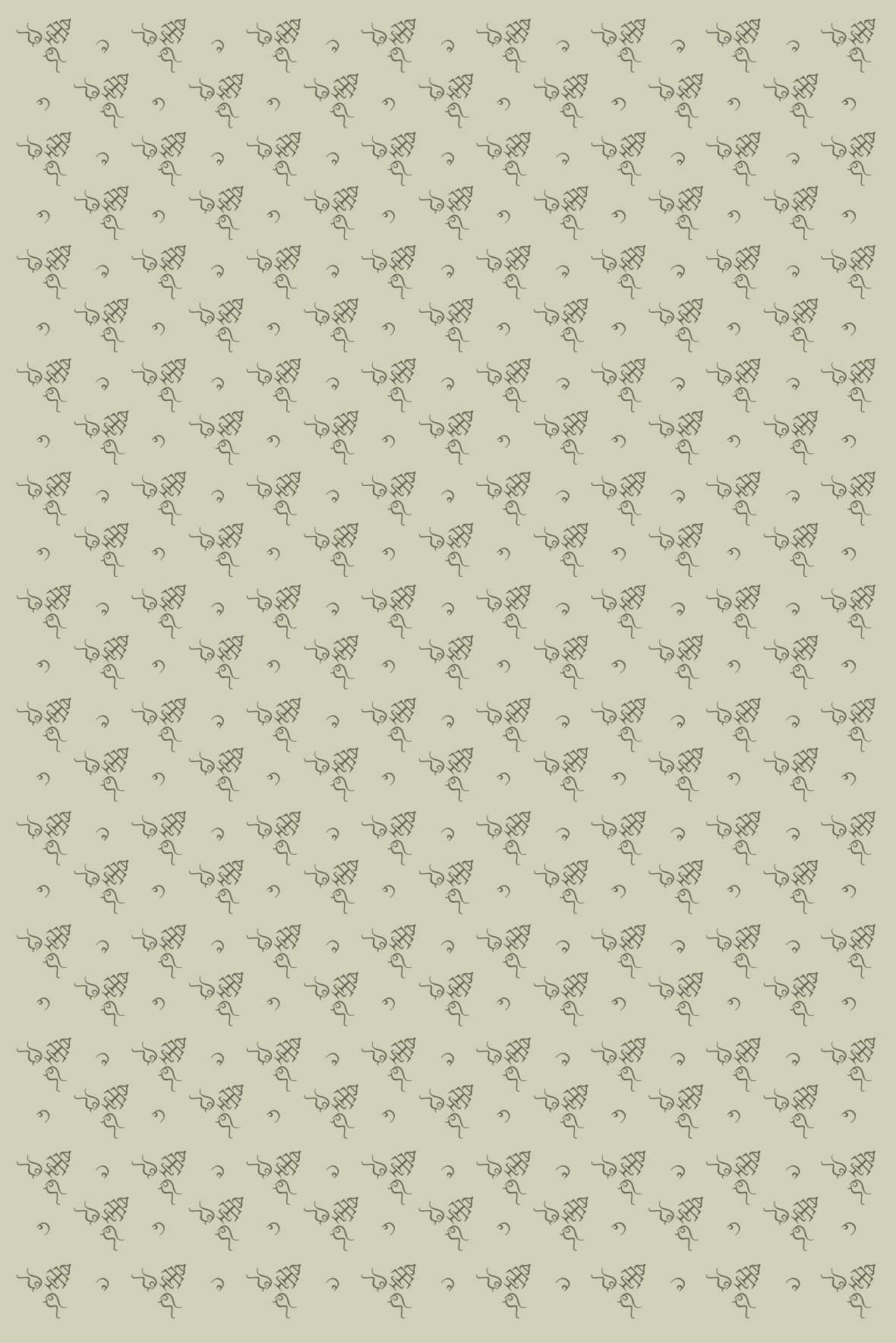




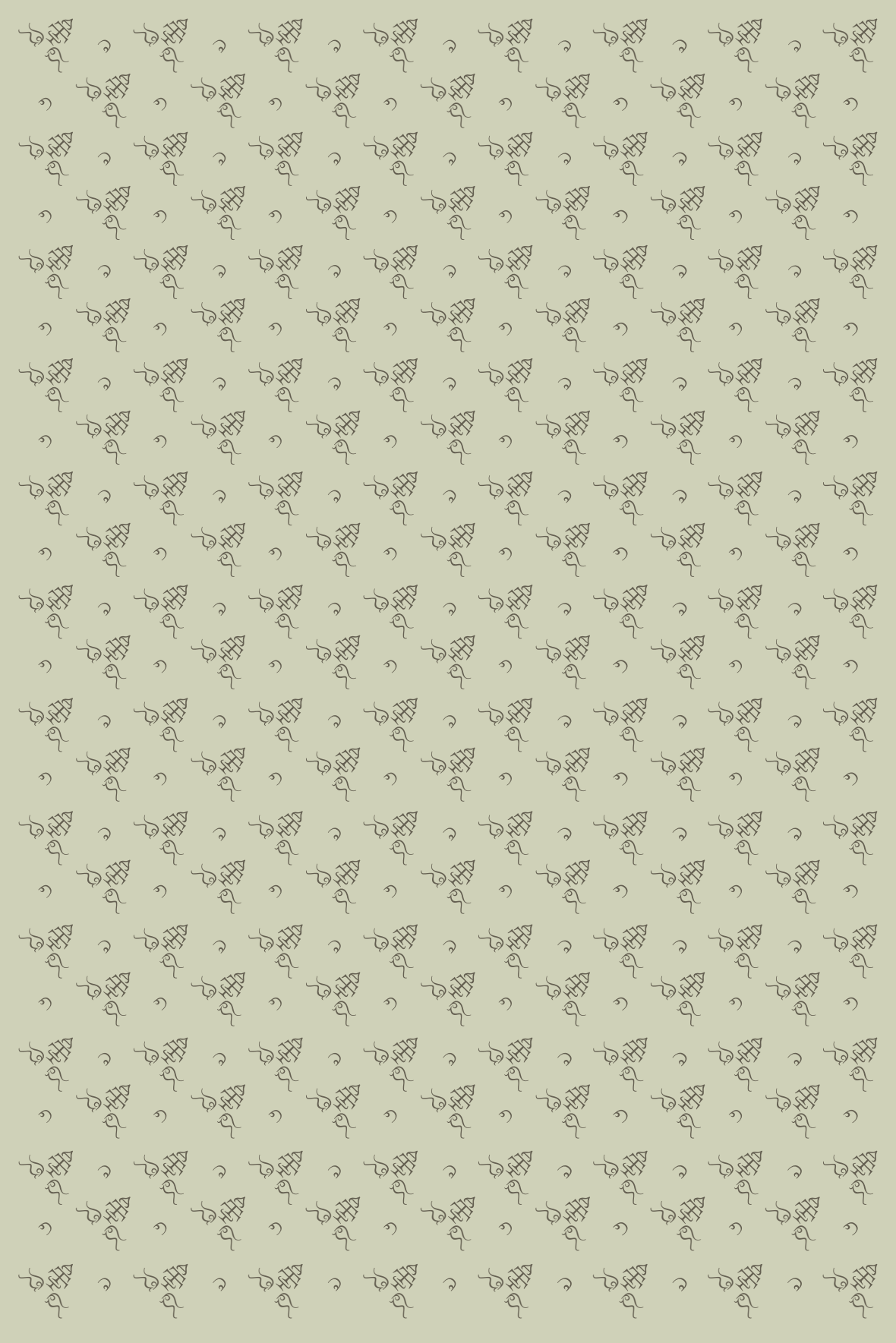
# REACH OF THE ROACH GOD



A THOUSAND THOUSAND ISLANDS









REACH OF  
THE ROACH GOD





# REACH OF THE ROACH GOD

Adventures and Settings in  
A THOUSAND  
THOUSAND ISLANDS



# REACH OF THE ROACH GOD



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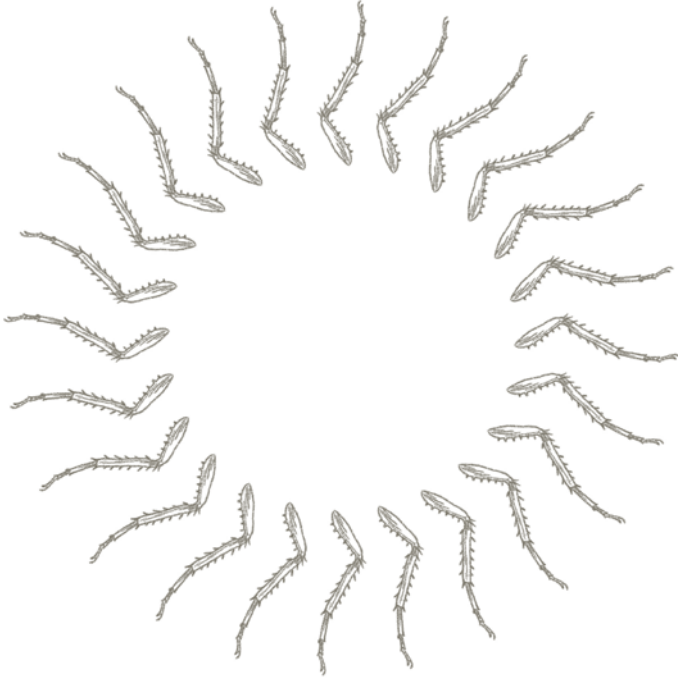
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# INTRODUCTION



In a world beneath the world, a god of vermin grows.  
The more he grows, the more he wants to grow.  
He will not be satisfied. He will not stay away.

Already his feelers have brushed the surface. Already  
his children sleep in your bed. Who will stand against  
his coming? How can he be stopped?

# WHAT IS THIS BOOK?



REACH OF THE ROACH GOD is tabletop roleplaying game (RPG) adventure setting, set in a world of caves. Players are drawn into its depths, meet new peoples, overcome strange dangers, and struggle against the ROACH GOD, ODOYOQ<sup>{P243}</sup>.



# BEFORE YOU BEGIN



You will need to UNDERSTAND HOW TO PLAY A TABLETOP RPG. Reach Of The Roach God is DESIGNED TO FUNCTION WITH ANY RPG YOU PREFER. Most RPGs have free versions of their rules available for download.

You will need PAPER, PENCILS, AND DICE. You will need FRIENDS TO PLAY WITH.



# PART ONE

Read, prepare, and PLAY THROUGH ONE OF THREE ADVENTURES.  
In order of complexity:

- ☞ CHAPTER ONE: QUIET LAKE<sup>{P17}</sup>. A small village plagued by thieving monsters; a love story between a bamboo cutter and a sacred lake; an imperiled queen seeking a better life.
- ☞ CHAPTER TWO: SPIDER MOUNTAIN TEMPLE<sup>{P49}</sup>. A monastery suffering from schism; a ghostly guardian trying to repair their mistake; a disillusioned monk who listened to the wrong god.
- ☞ CHAPTER THREE: CITY OF PEACE<sup>{P113}</sup>. A necropolis run by dishonest wardens; invasions by grave robbers, gentrifying bats, and roach spies; the court of a dead king, hungry for a kingdom.

Any of these will draw you and your friends deeper underground.



# PART TWO

Read and dream about the three gazetteers:

- ☞ CHAPTER FOUR: BU-NI-ANG-KA<sup>{P177}</sup>. A people of red-lit pale skin and quiet manners; a language of signs; a thriving community, already compromised.
- ☞ CHAPTER FIVE: BLIND ELEPHANT<sup>{P201}</sup>. A superior people of mineral substance; a family exiled from its home; a sister who was jealous of her mother.
- ☞ CHAPTER SIX: THE GOD ODOYOQ<sup>{P223}</sup>. A lesser sibling, now a greater god; an army of arguing chitinous children; an empire of desire and endless growth.

These let you glimpse the mores and motivations of folk, here in the dark.



## PART THREE

Read the bestiary, and use it alongside the cavern generator:

- ☞ CHAPTER SEVEN: OTHER PEOPLES IN THE DARK<sup>[P249]</sup>. A guide to the fauna and flora of this underground world—cricket gangs; sap-blooded tigers; worms trying to be men.
- ☞ CHAPTER EIGHT: A WORLD IN THE DARK<sup>[P273]</sup>. A METHOD to create chaotic cave geography, establish settlements and relationships; map trade routes and crises.

Together these let you create your very own underworld, threatened by encroaching roaches.



## PART FOUR

Now it is up to you. CONTINUE WITH YOUR CHARACTERS FROM PART ONE, and explore locations downriver. Or PLAY WITH DIFFERENT CHARACTERS, THROUGH THE OTHER TWO ADVENTURES—and let these groups meet in DEEPER SANG-LA<sup>[P280]</sup>, a fellowship of travellers.

What will your characters do, now? Will they seek trade in a world where jewels grow like grapes? Will they die ignoble, victim to a cave-in and torn rope?

Will they recognise the threat Odoyoq poses, and band together, and RESIST THE ROACH GOD'S REACH?



# READING CHARACTER DETAILS

Characters in Reach Of The Roach God are generally presented in the following way:

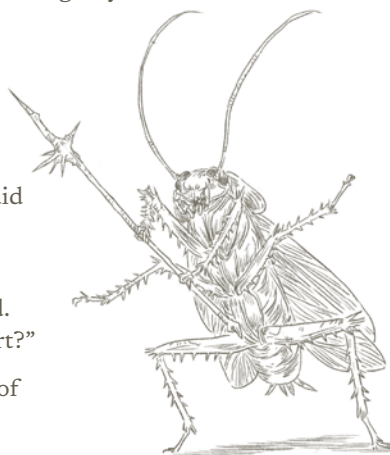
## ROACH SOLDIERS

② *Ordinary. Frail. Polearm-craft, flying, abducting. Chitin machetes. Chitin back.*

As tall as children, and as chatty. “Where did you come from? Are you good to eat?”

As cruel as children. Their lives are hostile schoolyards; better to bully than be bullied. They will test you, stab you. “Does that hurt?”

Any injury they cause has a 2-in-6 chance of transmitting a ROACH MALADY<sup>[P233]</sup>.



These details are presented in a RIGID SCHEMA, so as to be EASILY ADAPTED TO THE MECHANICS OF YOUR FAVOURITE RPG RULESET.

- ① The FIRST WORD describes the POWER this creature wields in the world:
  - ☞ ORDINARY. Common folk; a wild boar; a venomous krait.
  - ☞ EXTRAORDINARY. Storied heroes; a fearsome ghost; a demon.
  - ☞ POWERFUL. Saint-kings; a city god; an earthquake giant.
  - ☞ OVERWHELMING. Sea goddesses; world spirits; ancient divinities.
- ② The SECOND WORD describes the HEALTH of this creature:
  - ☞ HALE. Muscular, vigorous, can take hits.
  - ☞ FRAIL. Unhealthy, brittle, goes down quick.
- ③ The THIRD SENTENCE is a list of THREE SKILLS this creature is expert at. They should receive significant advantages whenever acting on or challenged in these things.
- ④ The FOURTH WORD describes the creature's ATTACK: the weapon or body-part they use to cause harm, or defend themselves. Can they be disarmed?
- ⑤ The FIFTH SENTENCE is a list of the creature's defences: armour, or protective charms. Every item on the list offers additional protection. Can these shields be broken?

Adaptation notes, player-character options, and more at  
ATHOUSANDTHOUSANDISLANDS.COM





CHAPTER 1

# QUIET LAKE



A Daughter Haunted By  
Her Father's Pain





# ELALELA AND ODOYOQ



The demon Oðoyoq was born in a deep womb of the earth. His youth was an endless night, spent wrestling his siblings.

Being smallest, he was often beaten. His brothers plucked all hair from his body. Shamed, Oðoyoq slunk away. He crept through squeezes his sisters could not fit. Crawled up shafts they were too lazy to climb.

He came to a cavern so vast, with seemingly distant glittering stalactites as pinpricks of light—

For the first time Oðoyoq saw stars in the open sky. And as he watched one star fell rushing towards him.

Oðoyoq shrank, shielding his eyes. When he opened them again a maiden stood before him. She was bare of feet, blush of face—and she spoke his name: “Oðoyoq.”

Then she spoke her name: “Elalela.”

The star Elalela took pity on the demon Oðoyoq. She kissed his wounds, salved his skin. As she did so she taught him stories—of language and war; of music and medicine; of temples and kingdoms.

The demon Ođoyoq loved the star Elalela.  
The longer he listened, the more he loved.  
After he was healed and she stopped teaching,  
Ođoyoq touched her hand. He said, in the  
tongue Elalela taught him:

“Wondrous star, I beg you, stay with me.”

But Elalela spoke: “Faithful student,  
you have learned the panoply of worlds under  
heaven. You need me no longer.  
Take my lessons, live as a full person.”

Elalela touched his hand, and spread her wings,  
and in flying returned to the sky and her sisters.

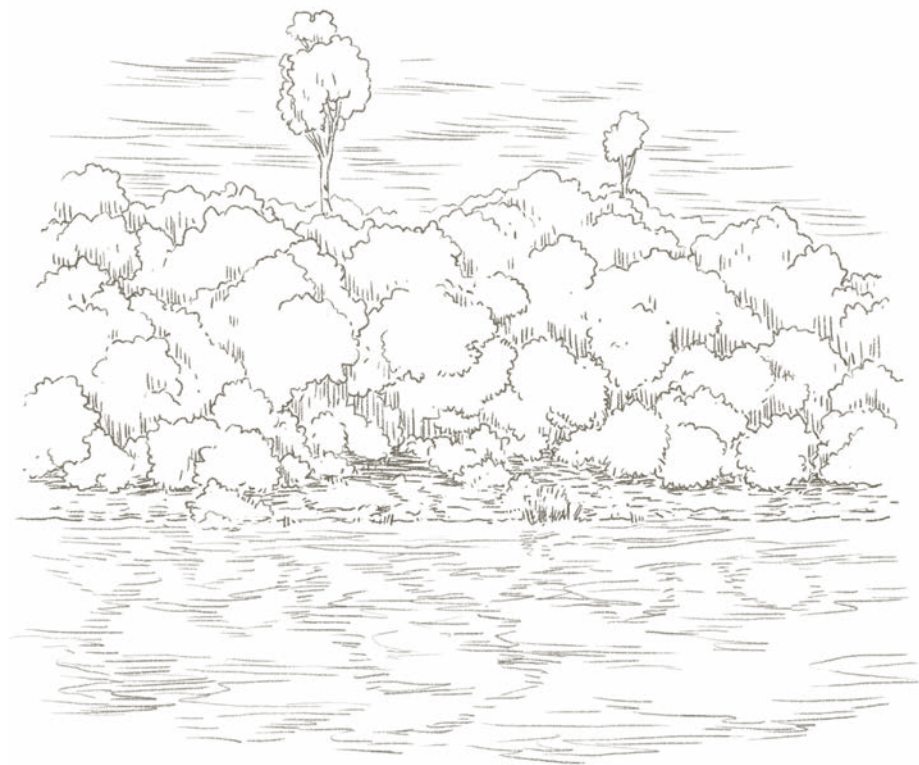
Ođoyoq wept alone. In his tears was  
his love for the star Elalela. He wept it all away.  
As he wept he changed—his skin turned to shell,  
his belly bloated with pus, his limbs  
shrivelled into spiny hooks.

In the language Elalela taught him,  
Ođoyoq cursed every star in the open sky.  
Finally, when he could weep no more,  
his tears filled a wide lake.

The demon Ođoyoq left his love behind.  
He kept its absence as the one lesson within him.  
He returned to his siblings, and the deep womb  
of his birth, to live in endless night.



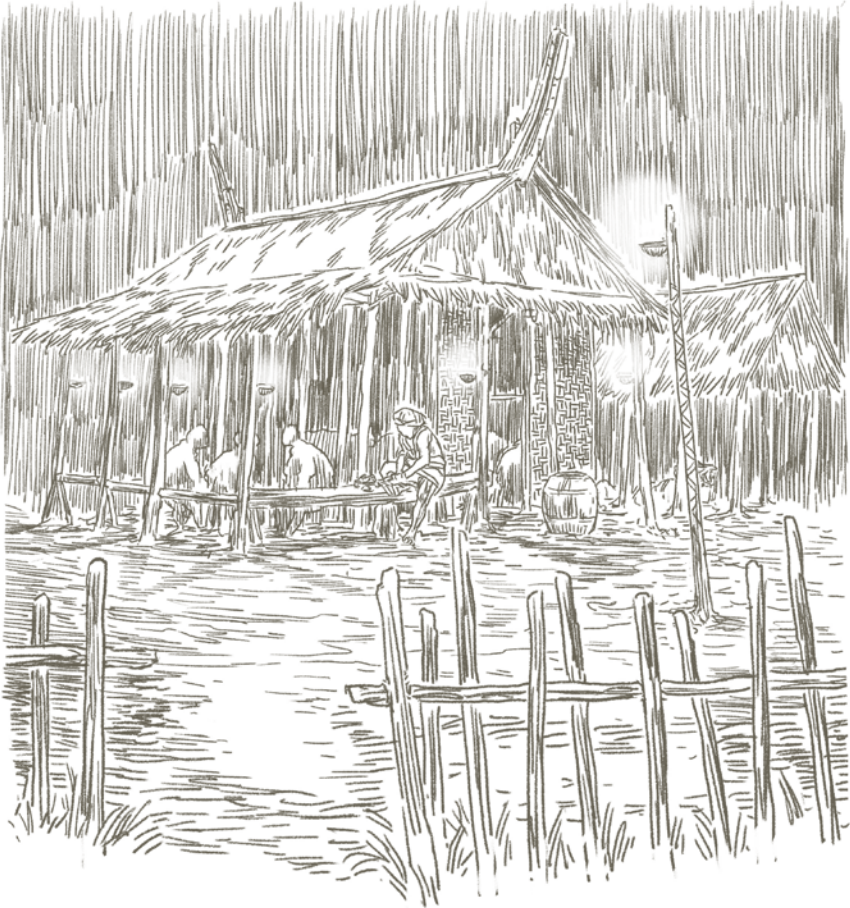
# TWO DAYS, WEST ON THE RIVER



People tell you they have seen a shape in flight,  
at night. You hear something keening, far overhead  
“Eh-hueh eh-heeee!”

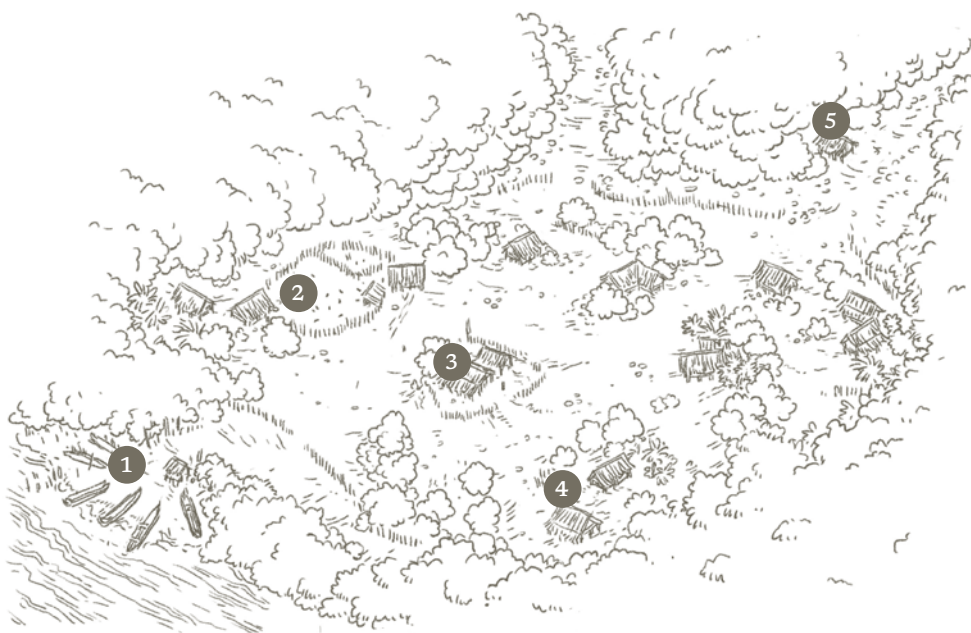
All things hush. Three breaths pass. Somewhere  
a baby, startled awake, starts to scream

# GINTA'S TEA STALL



Travellers sleep on the floor, after closing time. But now the lamps are relit. GINTA is cutting nuts, folding them into betel leaves; he's put a wine-jug on the stove. Locals are arriving. They come armed. They will try to GOSSIP their worry away.

# VILLAGE CENTRE



## ① MUSUN'S BOAT

Caulked with hex-paper, NOBODY ABOARD MAY TELL A LIE. Except Musun.

## ② GOAT SHED

The largest billy has a bite on his neck, as if made by MANDIBLES. It festers. After a day: ROACHES erupt from the wound.

BLOOD SPATTER leads to HORSEHEAD CAVE<sup>{P26}</sup>.

## ③ GINTA'S TEA STALL

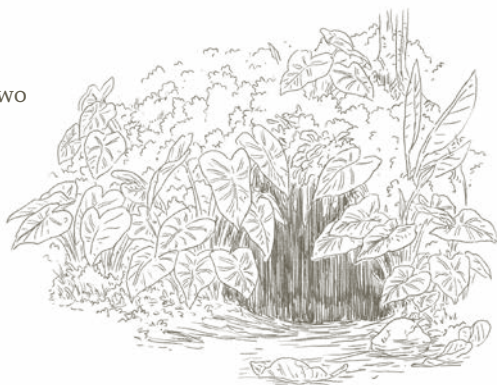
Sells FRESH FOOD that spoils after two days; sells jars of WINE that keep.

## ④ LURA'S HOUSE

Stowed in the rafters: a BRASS SHIELD fringed with faded campaign ribbons.



## ⑤ IBA'S HOUSE

Musun's PEARL NECKLACE hangs from a windowsill. Iba swears she knows nothing about it. She suspects her LOVER<sup>{P36}</sup>.





## “LURA” Worried Mother

 Ordinary. Hale. Weapon arts, drinking, surviving.  
 Hand axe. Unprotected.



Hefts her axe in one arm, and her bawling infant daughter in the other.

“Warm milk, Ginta? Put some wine in it?” But before Lura can feed her, BABY IKA is out again, like a wick pinched out.

Lura will fear for her daughter. Tomorrow Ika will sit upright, her eyes turned black-brown, chanting nonsense: “O DO YOQ O DO YOQ O DO YOQ.”



## “GHIKRI” Goat Herder

 Ordinary. Frail. Goats, knots, running. Fencing mallet.  
 Unprotected.



Gangly. Their words come out quivering, as if dosed by too much caffeine.

“A KID! A KID’S MISSING!” They found the gate unlatched, the goats huddled on the SHED<sup>[P23]</sup> roof, bleating like spooked aunties.

They found a CHITINOUS SPIKE stuck to a fence post. “Look! A barb. From the monster? Ow!” They’ve PRICKED THEIR THUMB. It soon swells with pus.



## “IBA” Bamboo Cutter

 Ordinary. Hale. Machete-craft, forestry, singing.  
 Machete. Unprotected.

Weightlifter’s bearing, light moustache. Answers in low monosyllables.



Iba is too brave, her neighbours say. Unwise to visit QUIET LAKE<sup>[P32]</sup> at the best of times, much less now, her neighbours say. She should stay away.

“Okay,” Iba says. But SHE’LL BE AT THE LAKE TOMORROW. She met somebody, bathing there. An OGRE. They RENDEZVOUS EVERY DAY, NOW.





## “MUSUN NUN” Bead Peddler

 Ordinary. Frail. Bead-craft, boats, negotiating.  
 Dagger. Charmed beads.



Clinky, jingly—covered in bead loops and bangles.  
No indoor voice.

Musun refuses to leave any merchandise in her  
BOAT<sup>[P23]</sup>. Two nights ago she found a BAT MONSTER  
hunched on the bow, rifling through her boxes.

“Giant bat! It STOLE MY PEARL NECKLACE! Capsized  
my boat!” Not satisfied unless said necklace is  
returned, and reparations paid.



## “GALAK DENG” Village Healer

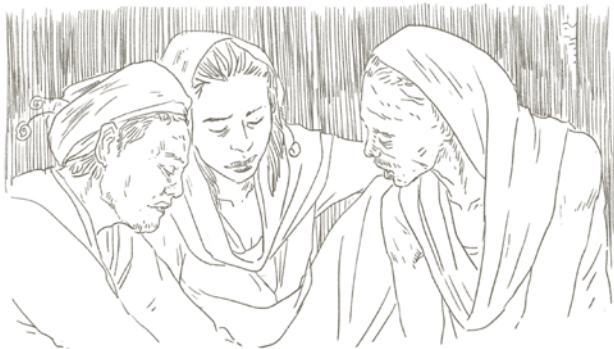
 Ordinary. Frail. Healing, histories, spitting. Blowpipe.  
 Brass amulet.

Terrible breath, skin like rough bark. Sentences  
choked by phlegm.

Handing out PAPER CHARMS to everybody he meets.  
These charms make their bearers INVISIBLE TO  
TIGER-SHAPED CREATURES.

Galak warns you against visiting QUIET LAKE. “It is  
a sacred place. It is not evil. But it is not inclined to  
involve itself in our troubles.”

Locals know the story  
of ELALELA<sup>[P19]</sup>, and  
how QUIET LAKE came  
to be. They do not  
know Odoyoq’s name;  
in their tellings, he is  
always referred to as  
“THE OGRE”.



# AROUND QUIET LAKE

## ① STAR'S SHRINE

Nine person-sized megaliths in a circle.  
Vague carvings, worn by time. Each stained  
with RECENT HONEY AND LIME JUICE—  
devotions by DEE WEE SHREE<sup>[P36]</sup>.

Pomelo-wide hole in the circle's middle:  
STAR'S WELL<sup>[P34]</sup>. You glimpse a palm-leaf  
book with gold covers, on a teak desk.

THIS IS AS CLOSE TO QUIET LAKE AS THE  
ROACHES WILL COME.

## ② HORSEHEAD CAVE

Garlanded with giant taro leaves. Inside:  
gore and bone. The kid's LEFT LEG REMAINS.

At the back of the cave: a CHITIN SPEAR and  
a CHITIN CLUB. Jam-jar-shaped DROPPINGS,  
wedged among the rocks.

Office-vent-sized entrance to MA BLAT'S  
PASSAGES<sup>[P43]</sup>, exhaling the odour of warm  
almond milk.

## ③ RIVER CAVE

Wade against a languid current into  
darkness.

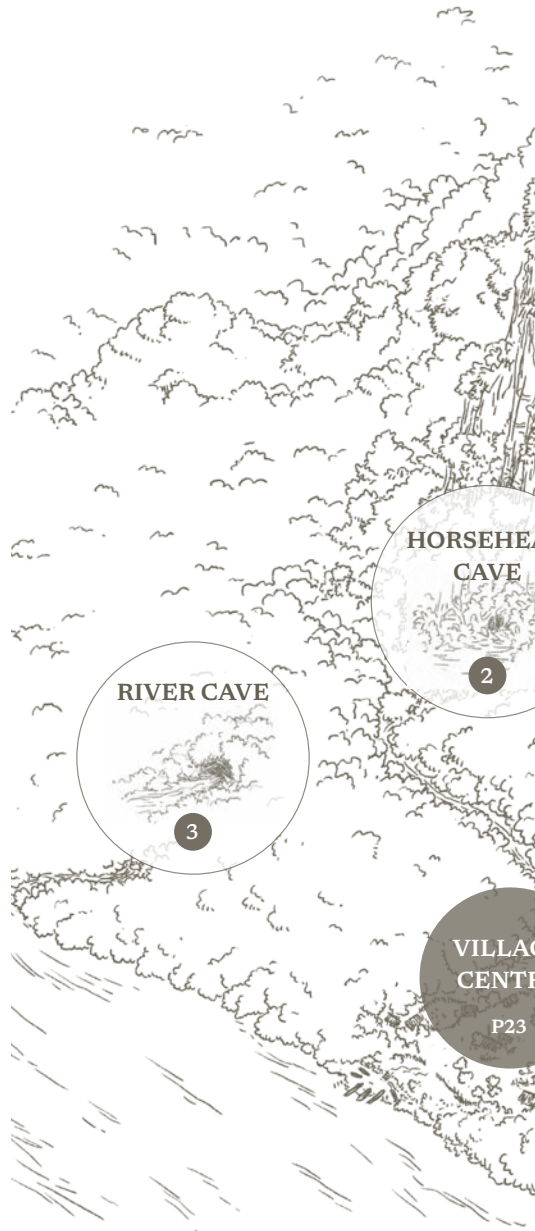
Cola-can-shaped DROPPINGS bumping the  
waterline, caught between rocks. This trail  
leads to MA BLAT'S PASSAGES<sup>[P43]</sup>.

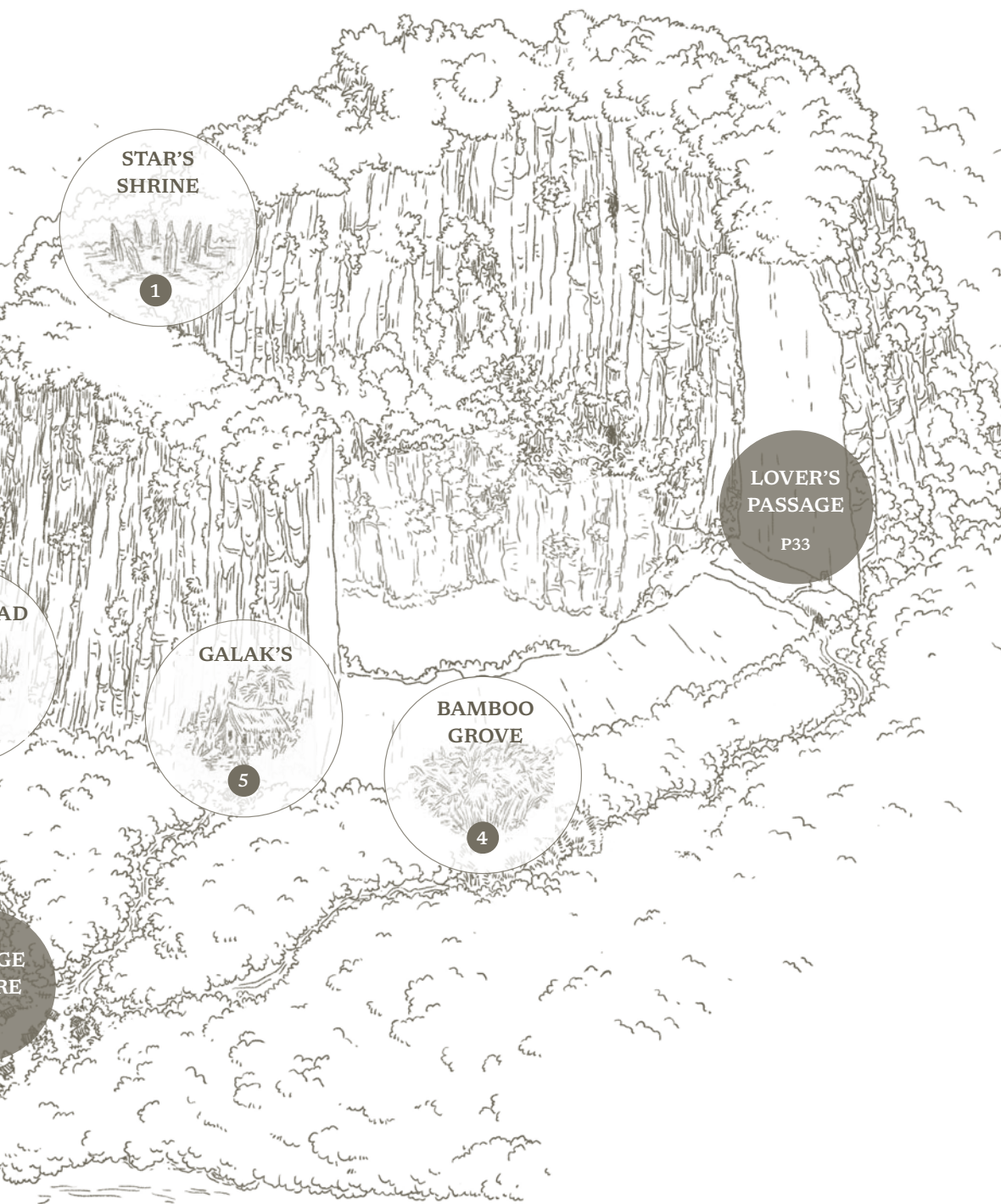
## ④ BAMBOO GROVE

The wind coos like a friend after you tell  
them you've been on a date—"Oooooo."

## ⑤ GALAK'S HOUSE

Sells MEDICINES. Conducted with all his  
accoutrements, Galak's ceremonies have a  
1-IN-6 CHANCE TO CURE A ROACH MALADY<sup>[P233]</sup>.





STAR'S  
SHRINE

1

LOVER'S  
PASSAGE

P33

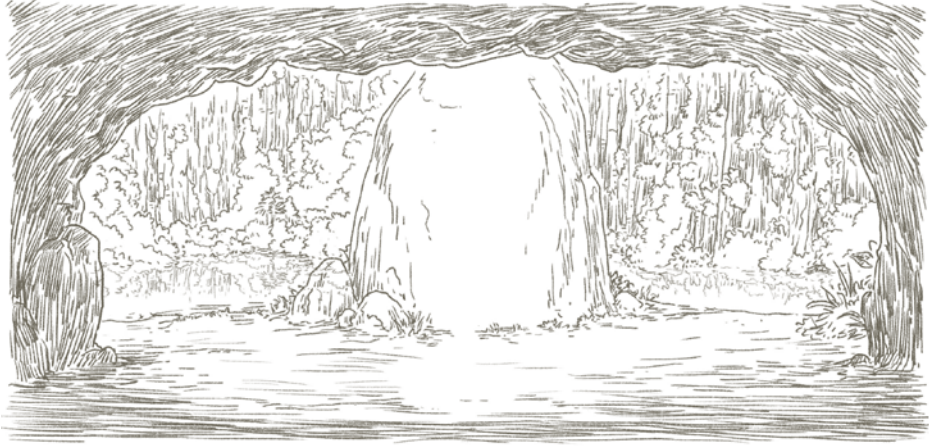
GALAK'S

5

BAMBOO  
GROVE

4

# TRAVEL AT QUIET LAKE



Existing PATHS ARE ABOUT AN HOUR'S WALK.  
Otherwise: the forest requires machete work;  
the limestone walls are sheer. It is a HALF-DAY'S TRAVEL  
BETWEEN UNCONNECTED LOCATIONS.

Jealous of rivals, DEE WEE SHREE<sup>(P36)</sup>  
uses his liquid-ogre form to CAPSIZE BOATS; he  
deposits swimmers onto the closest shore.

# ENCOUNTERS AT QUIET LAKE



There is always something.

ROLL WHENEVER YOU TRAVEL OUTSIDE THE VILLAGE CENTRE:

1 Dancing BUTTERFLIES  
with sizzling blue stripes

1 Unwittingly  
announcing

1 MUNTA<sup>(P37)</sup>, paler and swifter  
than a ghost.

2 A BANDED KRAIT:  
venomous and retiring

2 Momentarily  
spooking

2 A GOAT, late of Ghikri's  
shed, lost, bleating sadly.


3 A five-minute SHOWER,  
licking the path


3 Scolded by

3 A sudden breeze of eye-  
stinging DUST.


4 A cicada. It hisses:  
"O DO YOQ O DO YOQ!"

4 Unnoticed by

4 A swarm of flying ROACHES,  
 scouting ahead.

5 A ROACH SOLDIER<sup>(P42)</sup>,  
 missing a limb

5 Pointedly  
ignoring

5 A raiding party: six dog-  
 sized ROACH SOLDIERS<sup>(P42)</sup>.

6 The shadow of DEE WEE  
SHREE<sup>(P36)</sup>, swooping low

6 Clumsily  
trailing

6 A troop of SPECTACLED  
LANGURS, laughing.



## ROACH ENCOUNTERS

*When you roll an encounter with roaches , they begin to attack the village.*

AFTER ONE ENCOUNTER WITH ROACHES ~~~~~



Signs of struggle by the river. Upended box of painted shells.

MUSUN AND HER BOAT ARE MISSING. Trail of beads leads to  
RIVER CAVE<sup>(P26)</sup>.

AFTER TWO ENCOUNTERS WITH ROACHES ~~~~~



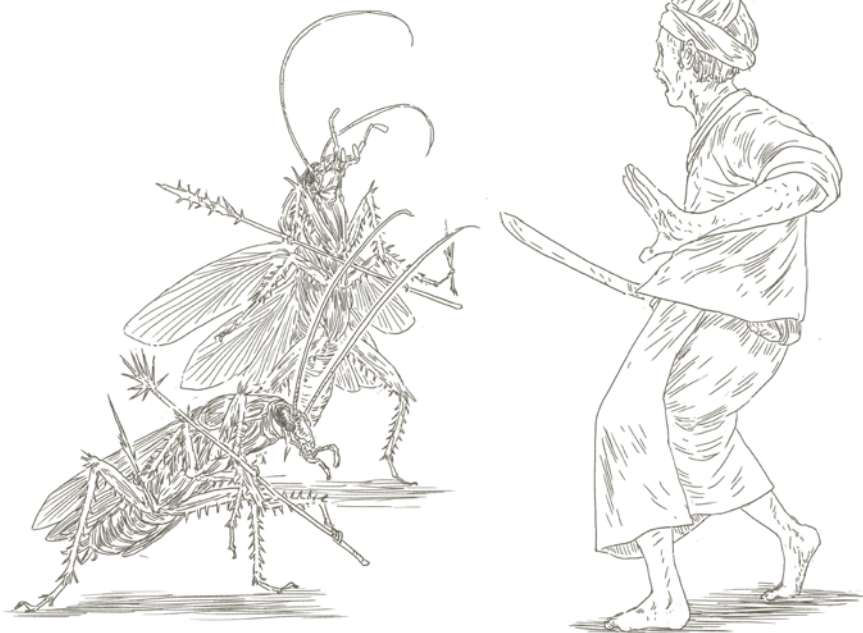
Yelling. LURA'S HOME<sup>(P23)</sup> IS UNDER ATTACK. She cuts down three roach  
soldiers by herself, but a fourth books it, BABY IKA IN THEIR ARMS.

Attempts to escape down HORSEHEAD CAVE<sup>(P26)</sup>.

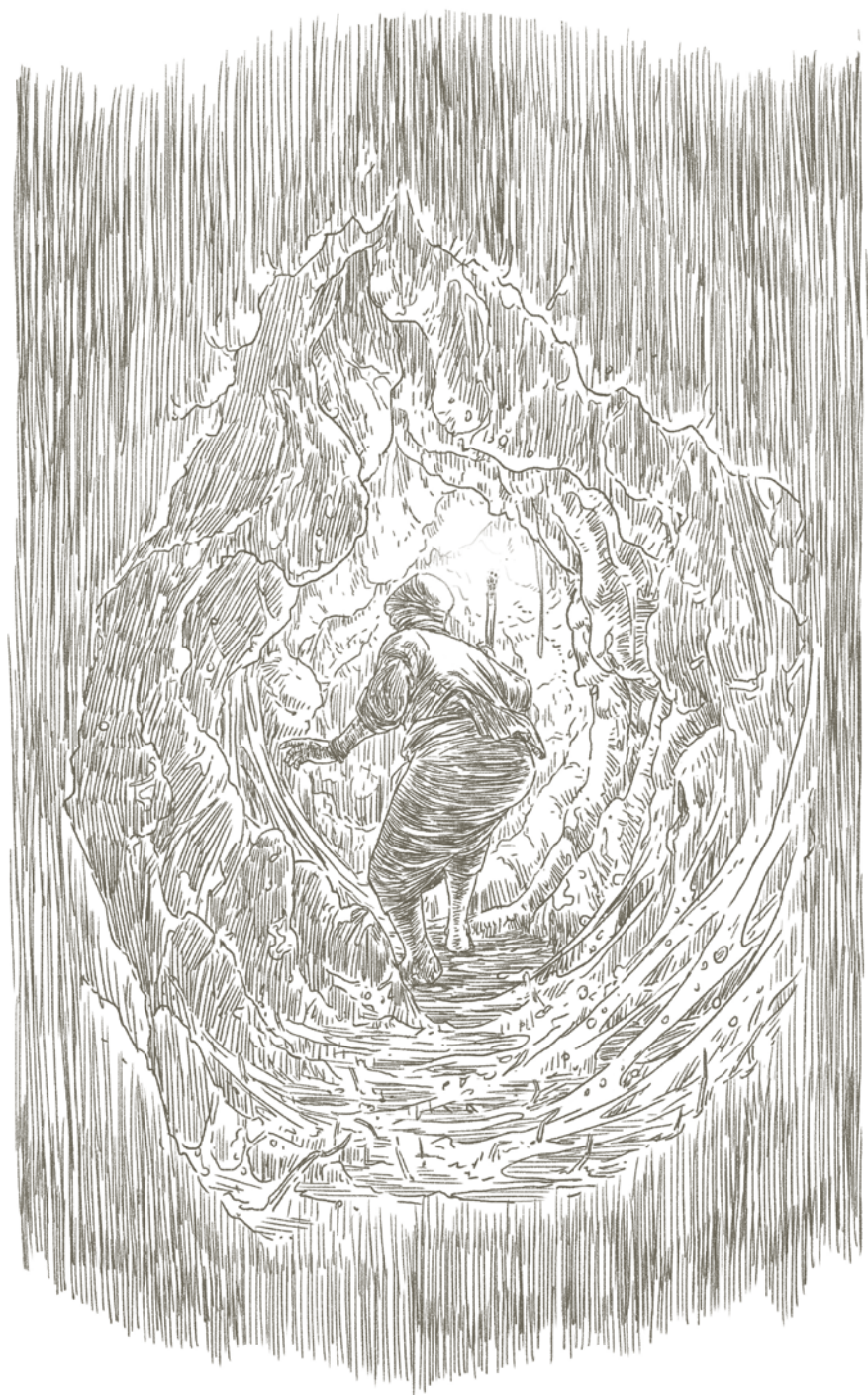
AFTER FOUR ENCOUNTERS WITH ROACHES ~~~~~



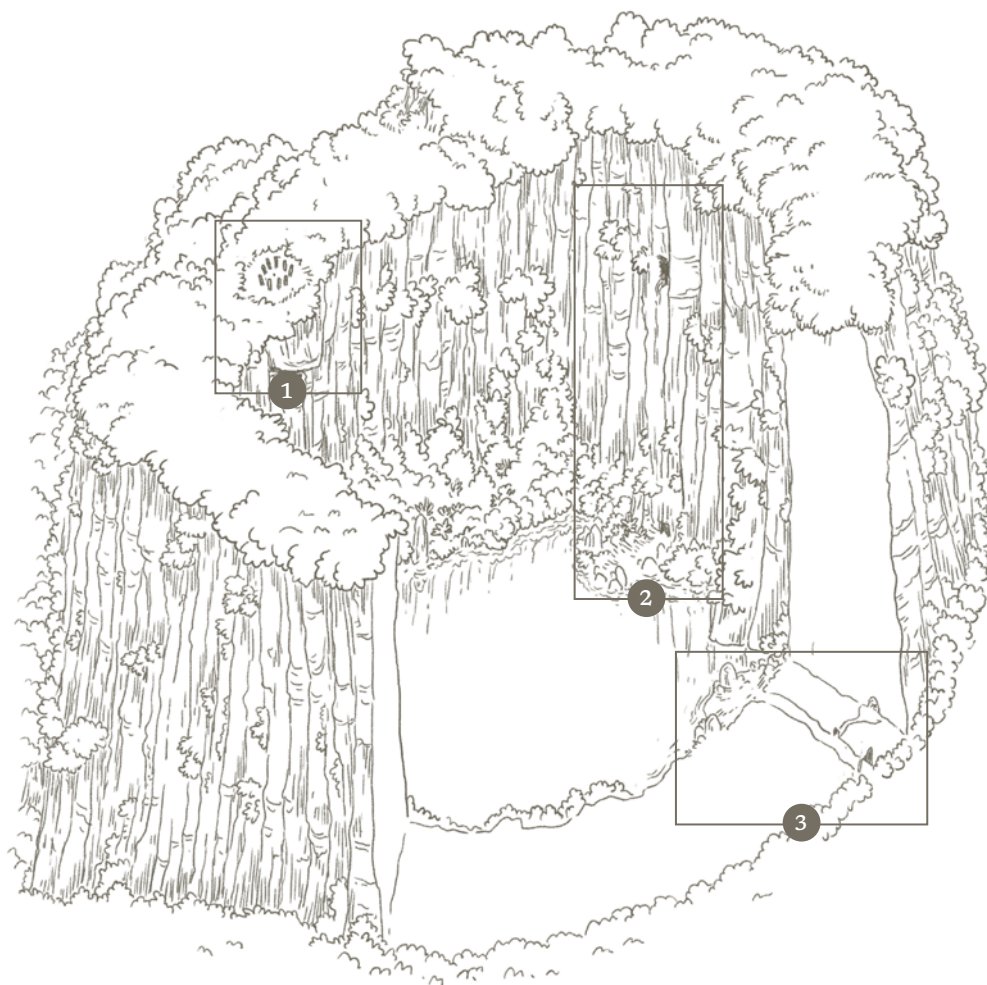
MA BLAT<sup>(P40)</sup> and TWELVE ROACH SOLDIERS<sup>(P42)</sup> attack the village  
in force. They ABDUCT ALL CREATURES PRESENT.



Roaches NEVER WILLINGLY MOVE WITHIN SIGHT OF QUIET LAKE, and will FLEE  
FROM OPEN VESSELS OF ITS WATER.



# QUIET LAKE



①

ASCETIC'S CAVE

{P34}

②

SWIFTLET CAVE

{P35}

③

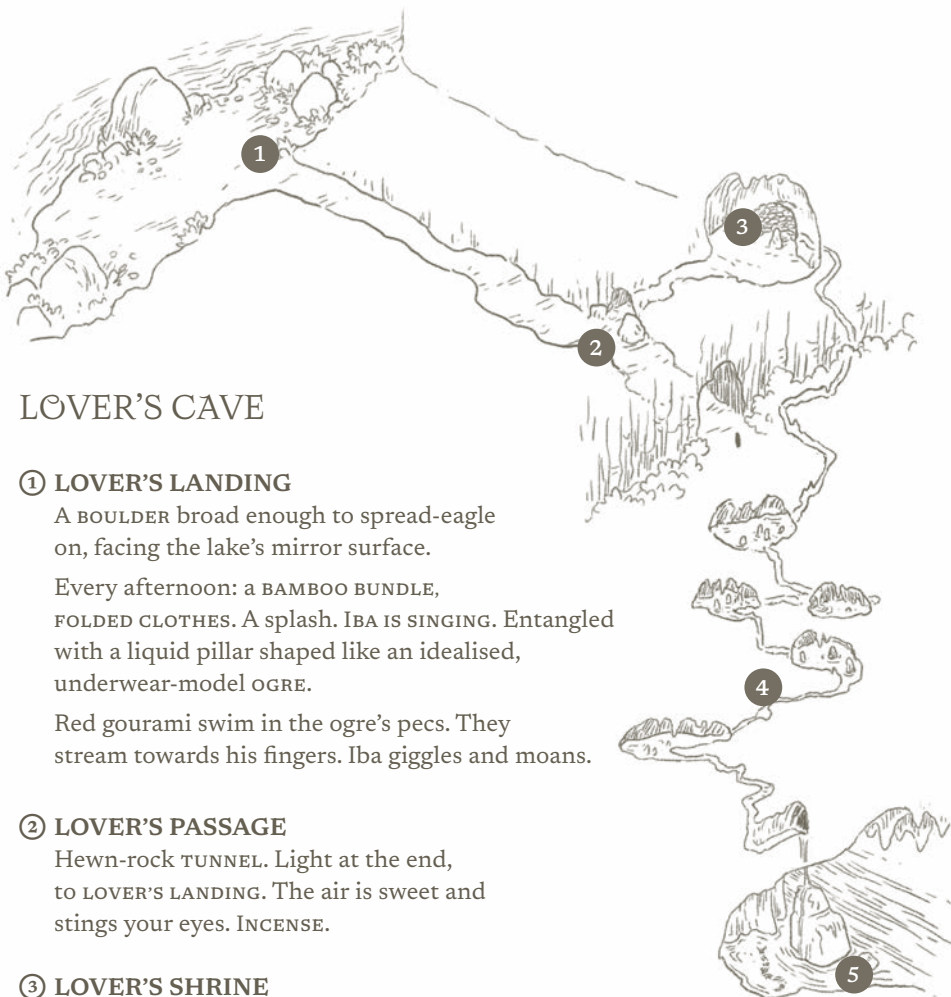
LOVER'S CAVE

{P33}

The water swallowed Odoyoq's regret—at all that he longed to say to his heart's desire, yet never did. THINGS ARE HUSHED, HERE. Sound carries. The distant chirrup of swiftlets.

The lake inspires an ancestral, existential horror in roaches. ROACHES NEVER WILLINGLY MOVE WITHIN SIGHT OF IT.





## LOVER'S CAVE

### ① LOVER'S LANDING

A BOULDER broad enough to spread-eagle on, facing the lake's mirror surface.

Every afternoon: a BAMBOO BUNDLE, FOLDED CLOTHES. A splash. IBA IS SINGING. Entangled with a liquid pillar shaped like an idealised, underwear-model OGRE.

Red gourami swim in the ogre's pecs. They stream towards his fingers. Iba giggles and moans.

### ② LOVER'S PASSAGE

Hewn-rock TUNNEL. Light at the end, to LOVER'S LANDING. The air is sweet and stings your eyes. INCENSE.

### ③ LOVER'S SHRINE

An alcove, an ALTAR. Iba has been burning benzoin for the FIGURE OF A WOMAN, SPEARING THE CHEST OF AN OGRE. The alcove is walled with PILED ROCKS. Behind them: LOVER'S SPIRAL.

### ④ LOVER'S SPIRAL

Dripping, gurgling. Fed by Quiet Lake: FIVE POOLS connected by wet VERTICAL SQUEEZES.

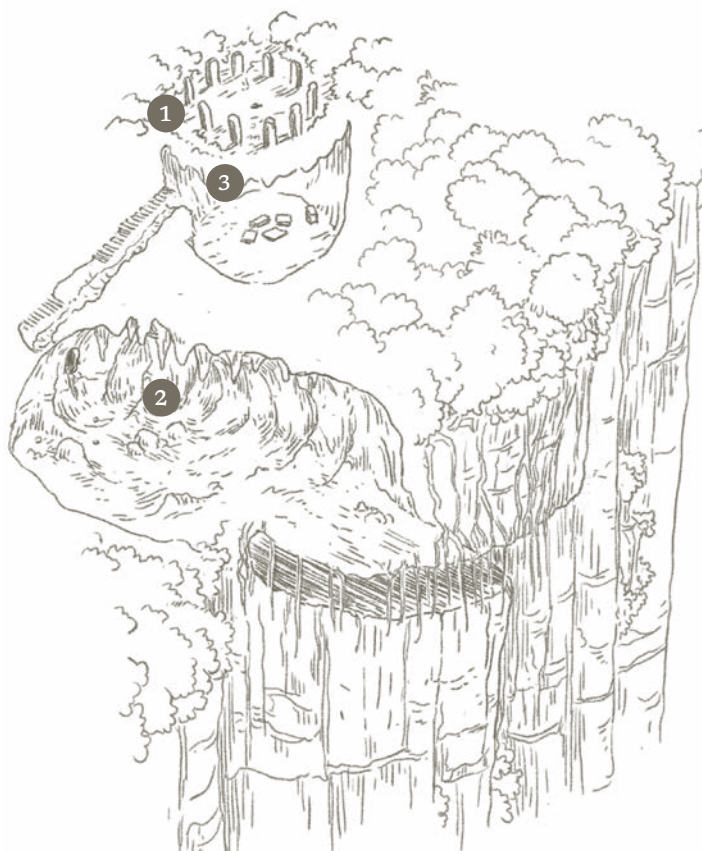
Final squeeze ends as a light drizzle into LOVER'S REST.

### ⑤ LOVER'S REST

Water rains on a stone. It could have been a seated STONE IDOL, ONCE. Behind it: an alcove of dug earth. The RIVER CENTIPEDE RETREATS HERE if injured.

Open mouth to MUST-NOT'S WAY<sup>[P38]</sup>.

THIS IS AS CLOSE TO QUIET LAKE AS THE ROACHES WILL COME.



## ASCETIC'S CAVE

### ① STAR'S SHRINE<sup>[P26]</sup>

### ② ASCETIC'S PAVILION

A hole in an overhang. VINES like stage curtains. Commands a view of the whole lake.

Brass handles in the ceiling. Usually present: DEE WEE SHREE<sup>[P36]</sup>, trying to meditate. If he sees you he leaves in the opposite direction.

Afternoons: he conjures his liquid-ogre form to tryst with IBA.

Stepped ceiling to a locked brass door to STAR'S WELL. Dee Wee Shree has the key.

### ③ STAR'S WELL

Oubliette with a pomelo-wide skylight—STAR'S SHRINE.

Here, a palm-leaf book sits on a teak desk. In bat-folk script, the QUIET LAKE SCRIPTURE explains:

- ☞ Why one should abstain from carnal acts;
- ☞ A mantra to help one focus: "o do yoq";
- ☞ Two spells: CONTROL WATER and COMMAND SMALL CREATURES.

## SWIFTLET CAVE

### ① SWIFTLET COLONY

Noise batters you. No FLOOR; it is a TEN-STOREY DROP TO GUANO CAVE.

Half-cup nests honeycomb the north wall. Air thick with BIRDS. Approach and be VICIOUSLY PECKED. The colony is upset; MUNTA<sup>[P37]</sup> has been COLLECTING NESTS.

### ② GUANO CAVE

Din from SWIFTLET CAVE above. Poop patters on an ELEPHANT-SIZED PILE against the north wall.

Clicking MASS MOVEMENT. They scatter from your every step—beetles, isopods, spiders, pseudoscorpions. HURRY AND RISK A VENOMOUS STING. Conspicuously missing: roaches.

Mornings: MUNTA sits still, so insects crawl over them. Picking and boxing specimens.

### ③ PALM LANDING

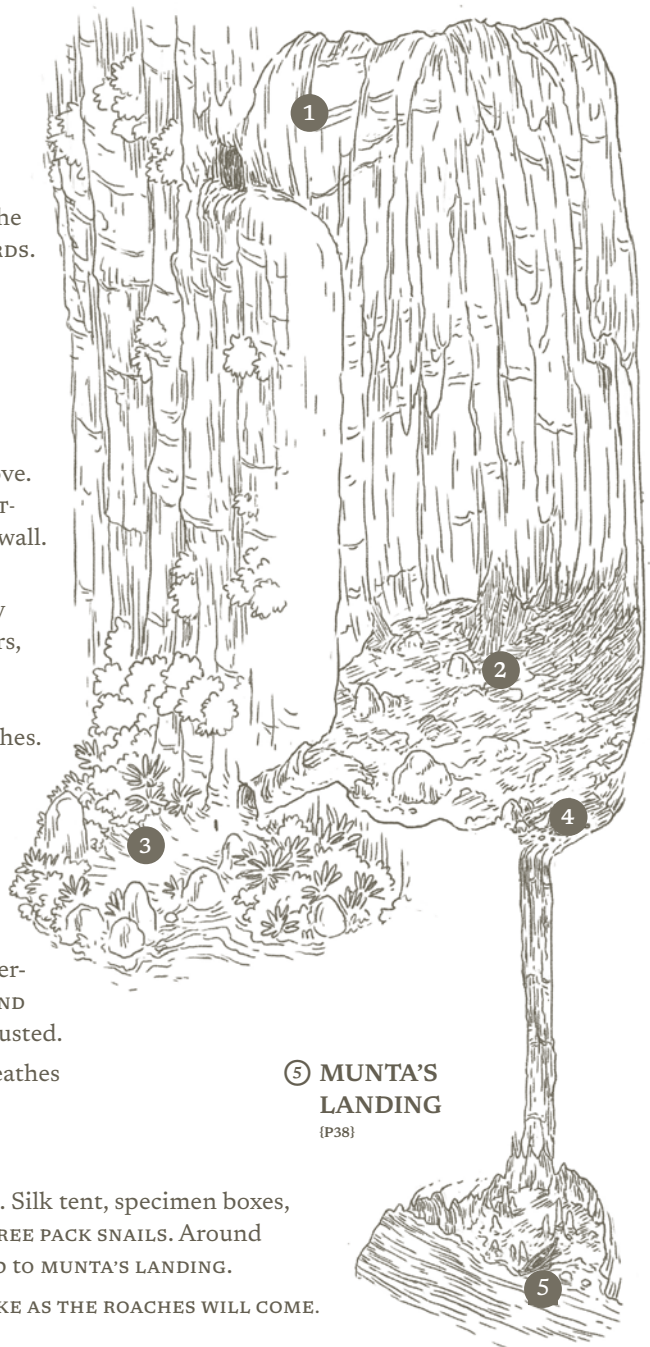
Fan-palm-choked beach. Afternoons: MUNTA spies on IBA AND HER LIQUID-OGRE LOVER, disgusted.

Entrance to GUANO CAVE. Breathes compost and rotting wood.

### ④ MUNTA'S CAMP

RED GLOW from a resin torch. Silk tent, specimen boxes, dissected swiftlet chicks. THREE PACK SNAILS. Around the corner: a five-storey drop to MUNTA'S LANDING.

THIS IS AS CLOSE TO QUIET LAKE AS THE ROACHES WILL COME.



⑤ MUNTA'S  
LANDING  
[P38]

# THE BAT


Dee Wee Shree belongs to one of the priestliest lineages of the City of Bats. He flew in A MONTH AGO, intent on a year in pious seclusion.

He CAUSES THE CHANTS that small animals and Lura's baby speak—his mindfulness leaks.

He has been distracted. The villagers SEE HIM FLYING, at night. They HEAR HIM SCREAM his lovelorn anxiety: "Hueh eh-heeee!" He stole Musun's PEARL NECKLACE. With CONTROL WATER he conjures a liquid ogre to court the bathing bamboo cutter.



## “DEE WEE SHREE” Angsty Ascetic

 *Powerful. Frail. Spells, fashion, love-making. Control Water. Charmed earring, charmed anklet.*

Saucer-wide eyes. Swaddled in dull-coloured silk. Emotes like a stage actor.

Will HURT NO LIVING CREATURE. Dee Wee Shree is seeking enlightenment. Truly! But he has been sorely tested. First the swiftlets were too loud.

Then he met the girl. He doesn't even know her name. She thinks he is a handsome ogre. WHAT IF SHE DISCOVERS HE IS A BAT? What then? What to do? He begins to hyperventilate: "Eh-hueh heeee!"

---

# THE ORANG UTAN

Munta and their PACK SNAILS came up one week prior.

They have come to study the LOCAL CAVES' LACK OF ROACHES. Perhaps this quality may be harvested as a defence against Odoyoq's armies?

Munta DOES NOT TRUST DAYLANDERS. They assume you ignorant and unreliable. UNAWARE OF QUIET LAKE'S HISTORY.



## “MUNTA” Insect Witch

*Extraordinary. Hale. Insect-lore, poisoning, fist arts.  
Command Insects. Charmed necklace.*

White hair. Like a grandparent in a chair. Then they move.

They are quick as a camera flash. Their magic over insects DOES NOT EXTEND TO ROACHES. Will you help them test theories? Elsewise you're in the way. Dew-headed fool. Shoo!

CURRENT THEORY: something in the swiftlets is a roach repellant; they have to isolate the correct property.

---



# UNDER QUIET LAKE

The whole world moves—shadows, leaning away from your lantern. You'd better have brought light. Otherwise: UTTER DARK, UTTER CHILL.

Only sound. Everything ECHOES.

TRAVEL BETWEEN LOCATIONS HERE TAKE ABOUT AN HOUR.



## RIVER CENTIPEDE

 *Extraordinary. Hale. Swimming, grappling, retreating. Venom bite. Tough carapace, extra legs.*

An almost-glowing paleness. As swift and sinuous as an eel.

Blind, but as SENSITIVE AS A SHARK IN WATER. Attacks if you trail a body part in the river, or if violence breaks out. TARGETS THE WEAKEST CREATURE present.

The centipede's bite feels like being burnt alive.



① **MUNTA'S LANDING**

A river, lapping—MUST-NOT'S WAY.

A BOAT is tethered to a stalagmite. A ROACH SOLDIER<sup>(P42)</sup> chews through the rope; will flee over the water towards the BARGE WRECK.

② **MUST-NOT'S WAY**

Roaches call this flow the FORBIDDEN RIVER; in using it MA BLAT<sup>(P40)</sup> declared her apostasy. You think the current breaks oddly behind your boat. It does. A RIVER CENTIPEDE follows.

③ **LOVER'S REST**<sup>(P33)</sup>

④ **BARGE WRECK**

A carcass of wood and insect shell, broken on a shoal. Six ROACHES SOLDIERS<sup>(P42)</sup>, meant to stand watch. THREE EGG CASES left in the hold. The RIVER CENTIPEDE steals them when it wants a snack.



# THE ROACH CENTIPEDE



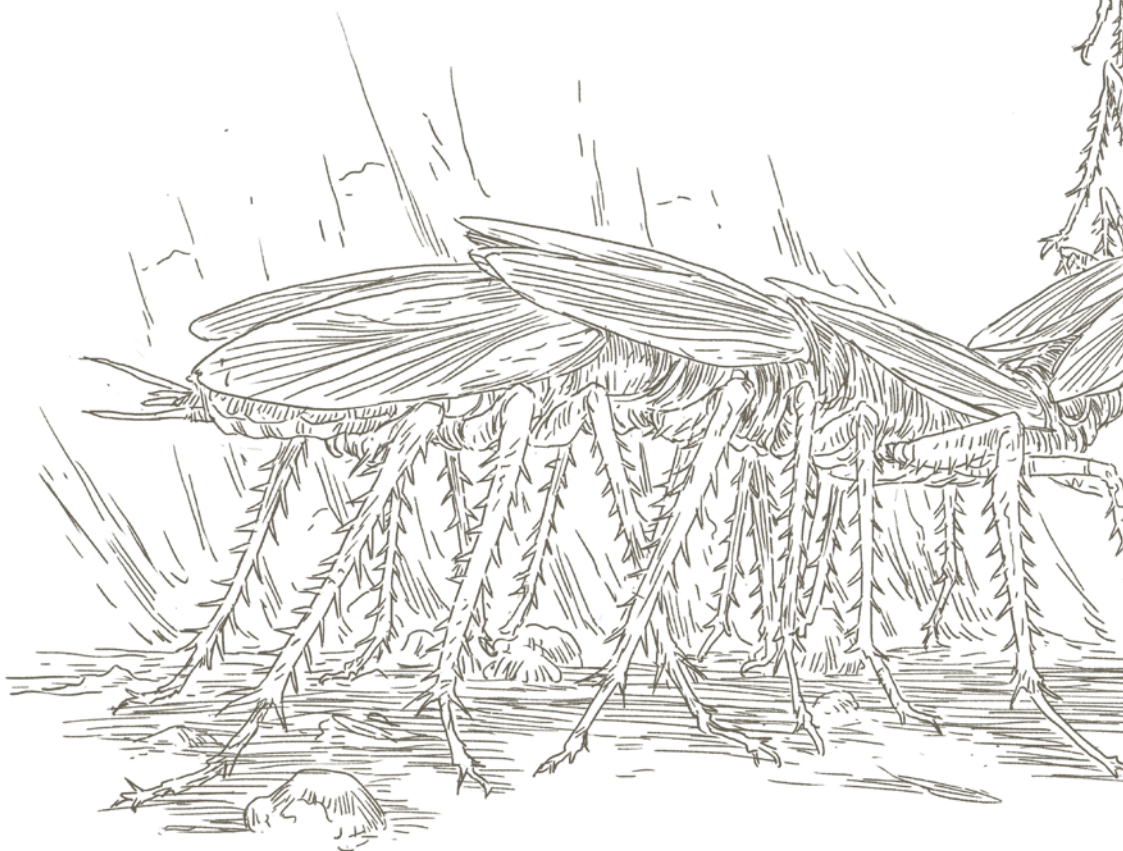
A daughter of the god Odoyoq—one of roach-dom's queens. She seceded, taking her brood with her.

Fleeing down the Forbidden River, she arrived here. It has been **THREE DAYS**, since.

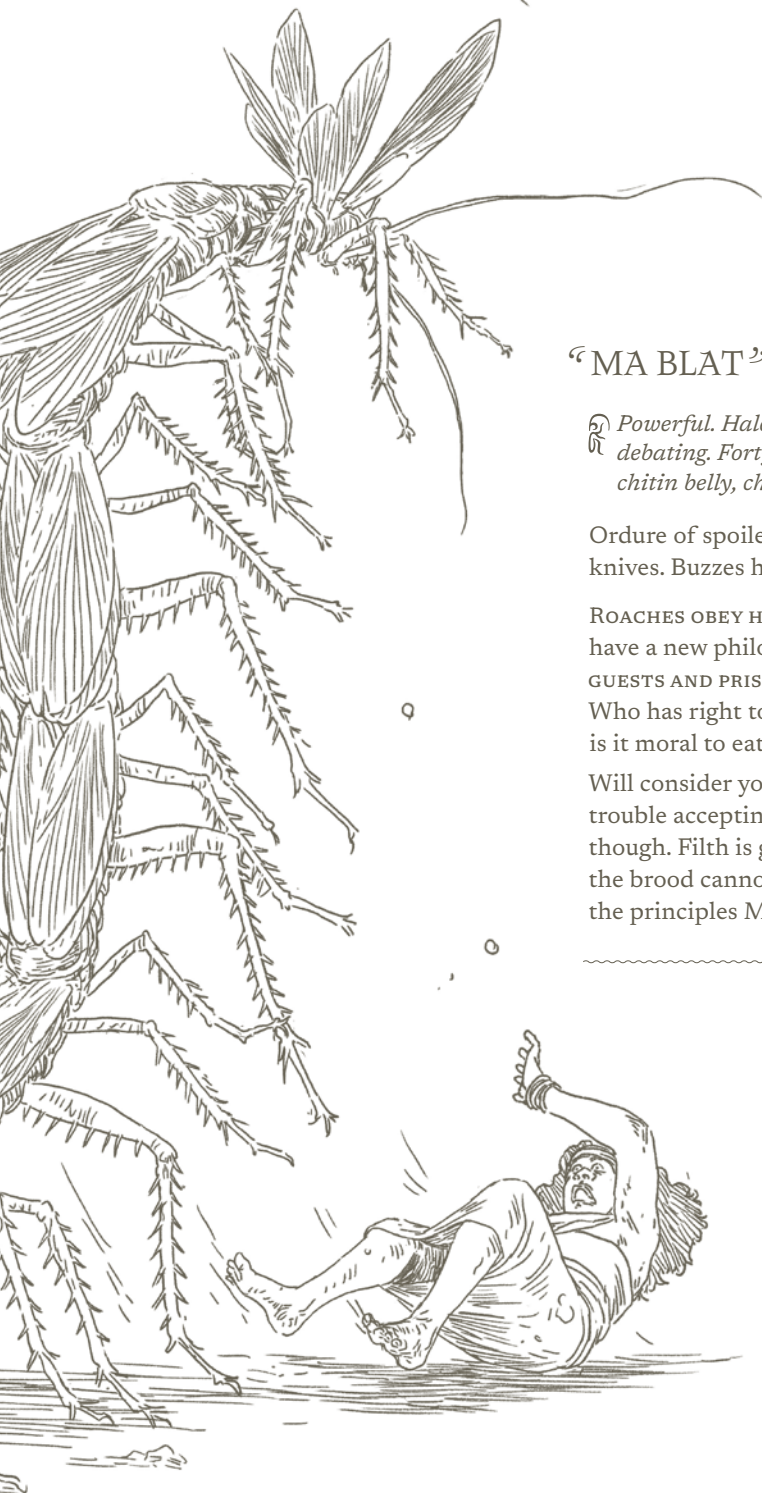
Settling these passages is a calculation.

True: they are close to a **NAMELESS WATERY DREAD**. But this means those loyal to her father are less likely to pursue.

They are close to the daylands: a world of inexhaustible food, no foes—a new world, **A NEW WAY FOR ROACH-DOM TO BE**.







## “MA BLAT” Aspiring Queen

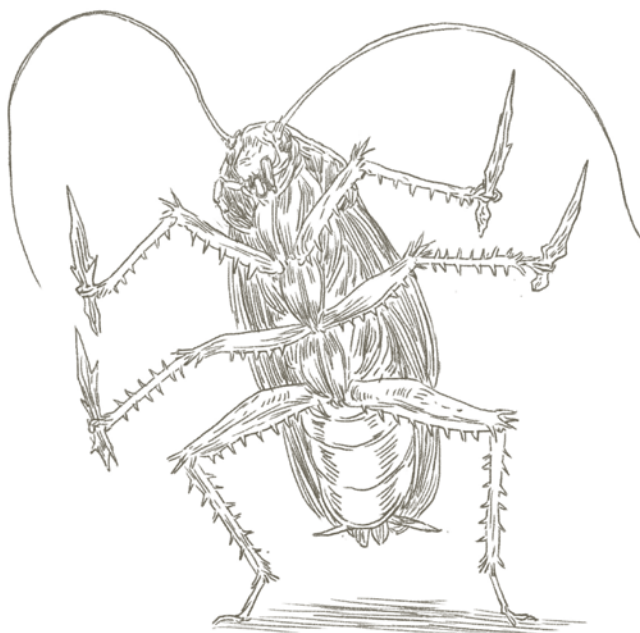
*Powerful. Hale. War arts, skulking, debating. Forty-eight legs. Chitin back, chitin belly, chitin head.*

Ordure of spoiled blood and rusted pen knives. Buzzes her wings when excited.

ROACHES OBEY HER. Her new society must have a new philosophy. So she QUIZZES GUESTS AND PRISONERS: “What is power? Who has right to rule? How many babies is it moral to eat?”

Will consider your answers. May have trouble accepting daylander values, though. Filth is good; the weak are food; the brood cannot stop growing—these are the principles Ma Blat was born to.

---



## ROACH SOLDIERS

*Ordinary. Frail. Polearm-craft, flying, abducting. Chitin spear. Chitin back.*

As tall and as cruel as children get, when raised by cruelty.  
As chatty as children. "Where did I come from? Does that hurt? Are you good to eat?"

As foul as children get. Any injury they cause has a 2-IN-6 CHANCE OF TRANSMITTING A ROACH MALADY<sup>{P233}</sup>.

---

Additionally, this roach soldier is:

1 MISSING THREE EYES. Bumbles.

---

2 Wearing a belt of CHITIN DARTS.

---

3 Covered with RITUAL SCRATCHES.

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4 Wearing ANOTHER ROACH'S LEG.

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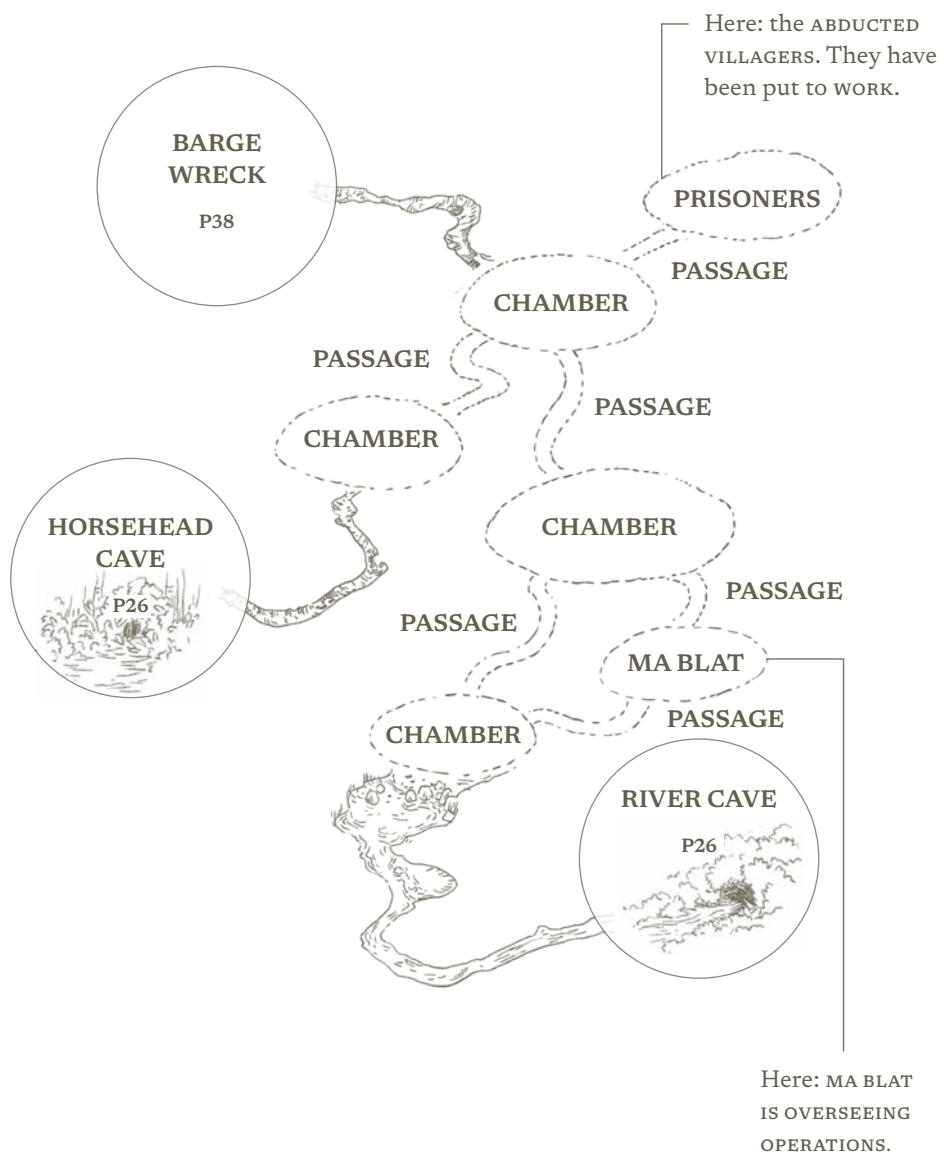
5 MISSING THEIR HEAD. Stumbles.

---

6 Wearing a ragged SILK CLOAK.

---

# MA BLAT'S PASSAGES



It is hard to keep your sense of direction.  
ROLL AT EVERY NEW PASSAGE. This is a:

1 TIGHT GAP. You must shimmy sideways, slow.

4 HOLE IN THE FLOOR. A three-storey drop. Rope?

2 SLIDE. As wide and steep as a playground slide.

5 CURVING CORRIDOR. Lots of corners to hide behind.

3 SHEER WALL. Next chamber is four storeys up.

6 TUNNEL. Roach-dug. 1-in-6 chance of collapse.

## CHAMBERS IN MA BLAT'S PASSAGES

The stone feels covered with feathers.  
Raise your light—caramel scales, ever rearranging. Roaches.

1 A low roof. You CANNOT STAND UPRIGHT. The roaches are fine.

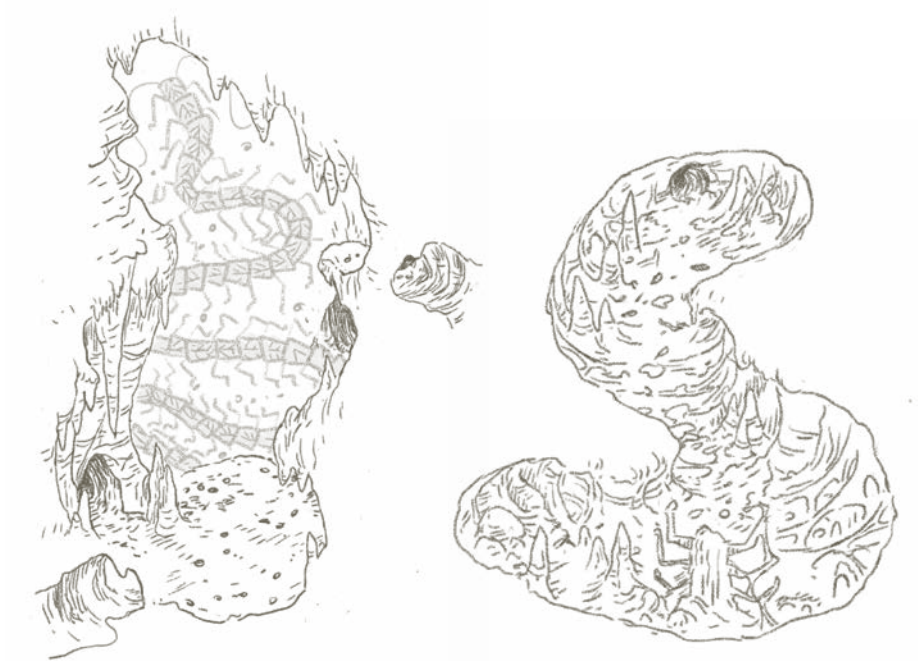
4 A sticky discharge, coating most surfaces. GAG AT ITS STENCH.

2 A CEILING OF STALACTITES, hanging like threats over your head.

5 A floor CARPETED BY BEETLE SHELLS. Your every step crunches.

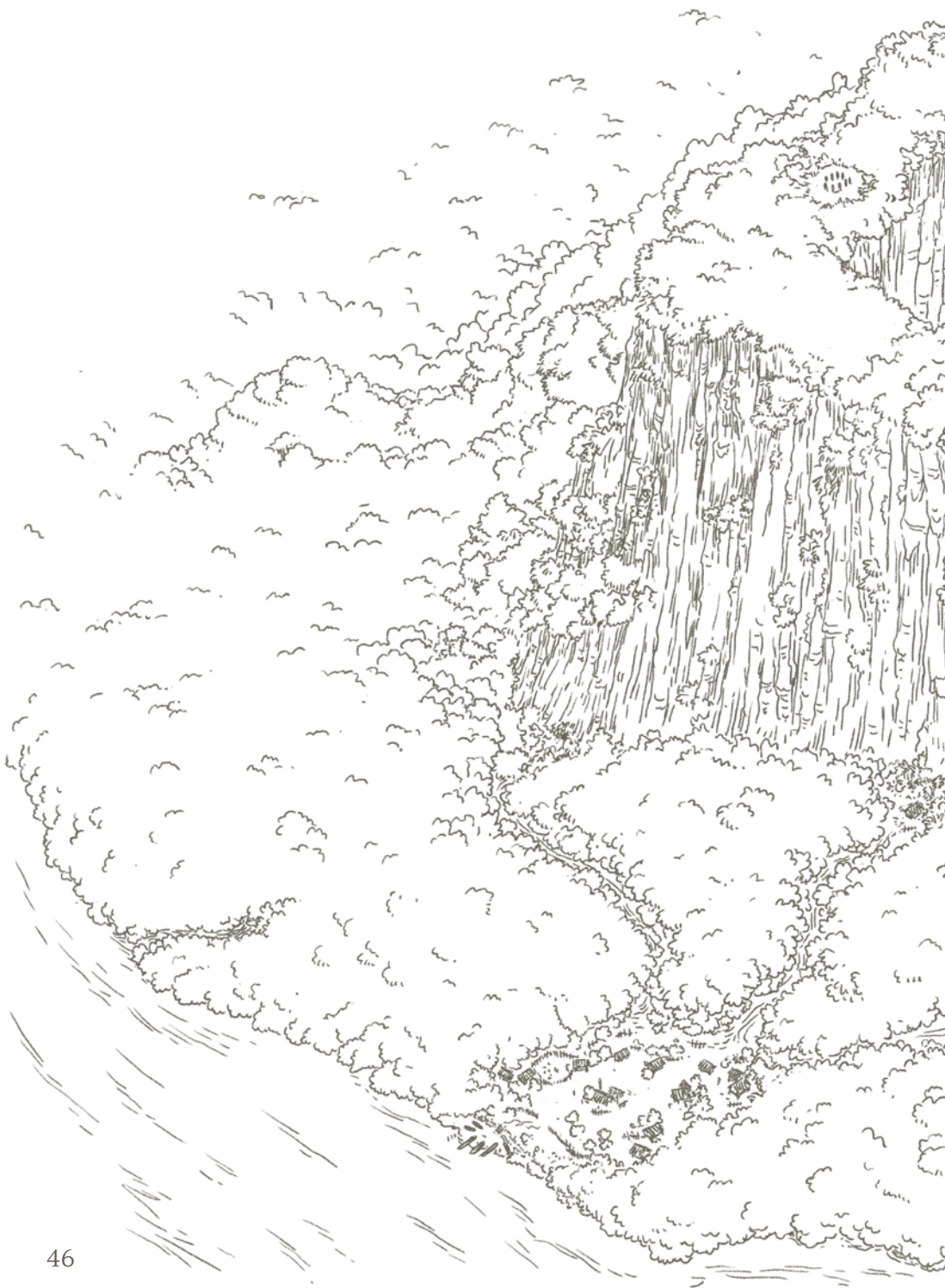
3 A chasm. You cannot see its bottom. GAP TOO WIDE TO JUMP.

6 A cascade. You are IMMEDIATELY DAMP. Mist obscures space.

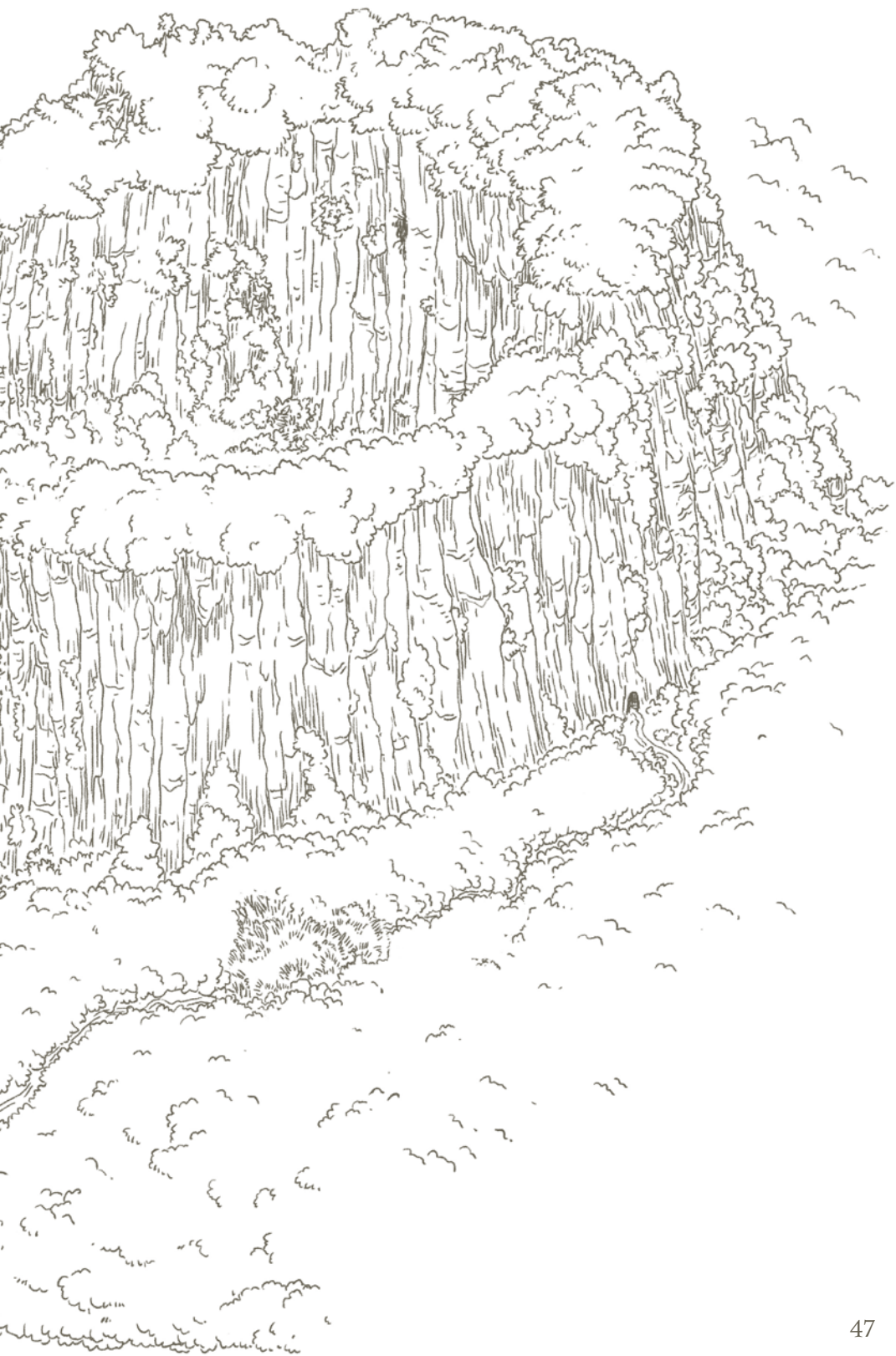


Ma Blat's brood is using this chamber as:

- 1 A **LARDER**. Meat and bones; textiles and plant-matter; dead bodies—sorted into three separate mounds. Two **ROACH SOLDIERS**, arguing.
- 2 A **NURSERY**. Egg cases coated in a bile, changing the nymphs within into more specialised roach-spawn. ONE **ROACH SOLDIER**, dozing.
- 3 A **BARRACKS**. Heaped droppings—cylinder-shaped, ash-urn-sized—arranged into nests. TWELVE **ROACH SOLDIERS** sleep and mate.
- 4 A **WORKSHOP**. Roaches, dissolving in acid, to be shaped and cured into tools, jewellery, weapons. TWO **ROACH SOLDIERS**, working.
- 5 A **TEMPLE**. An assemblage of debris and discarded skins. Six limbs—but no face. Odoyoq is no longer their god, after all. Empty.
- 6 A **GALLERY**. Ma Blat's secession, in crude figures, painted on a flat wall in black secretions and beadwork. ONE **ROACH SOLDIER**, painting.











CHAPTER 2

# SPIDER MOUNTAIN TEMPLE



Doubt Woven Behind A  
Serene Facade





# UDARAVA ROMANCES

## THE SPIDER



In those days demons haunted our country.  
Night was feared and dawn dreaded, for every  
morning brought new tears: a missing mother,  
an absent son, a shredded cradle—

And never a body enough to bury.

On such days Udarava would not control his  
temper. As evil stalked the land, his heart flashed  
hot. With wanton arts his dagger bit demon flesh:

Cleaving head and horn;  
Snapping tooth and talon;  
Puncturing palm and pit.

Three moons Udarava danced his war dance.  
His steps led him to the mountain fastness  
of Vigorous Spider, who was then a mighty  
princess of demon-kind. She called from on high,  
when she spied him at her gate:

“O warrior! Why should we fight?  
Are we not kin, in nature? See what skill  
you have, in making violence!”

So Udarava looked at the path he left behind him.  
He saw:

Homes breached and burning;  
Fields stamped and spoiled;  
People mute and mangled.

Party to such evil, Udarava wept. His heart  
drowned in regret. He called out to his mother,  
Sacred Deer, begging forgiveness. Instead,  
her spirit spoke in his memory:

“O my son! You carry your father’s blood.  
You do not carry his nature! You  
need not continue his sins!”

Recalling this, Udarava knew peace. He knelt  
there on the mountainside. When Vigorous  
Spider fell upon him, he did not flinch—  
he did not fight, though he was:

Squeezed by eight arms;  
Pierced by eight spears;  
Kissed by eight mouths.

With his legs and hands Udarava returned  
Vigorous Spider’s embrace. He would not let go.  
Though he whimpered, though he murmured,  
she could not get free. She found his  
submission very heavy.

And their weight together became so great,  
the ground itself could not hold them. A crack  
opened in the mountain. Into this crack toppled  
both warrior and princess, entwined—

Never to be seen for a hundred years.

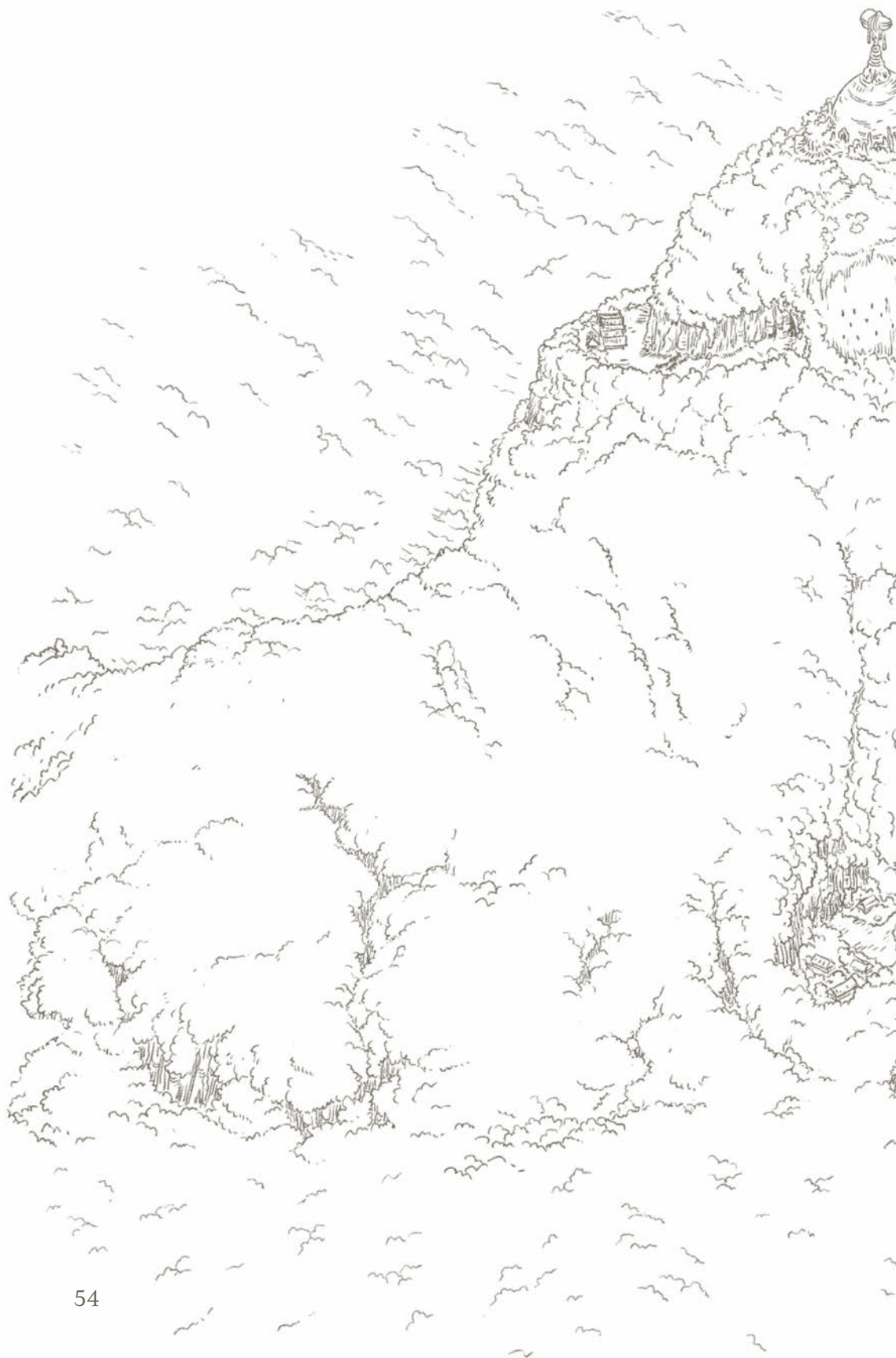


# FIVE DAYS, EASTWARD BY BUFFALO

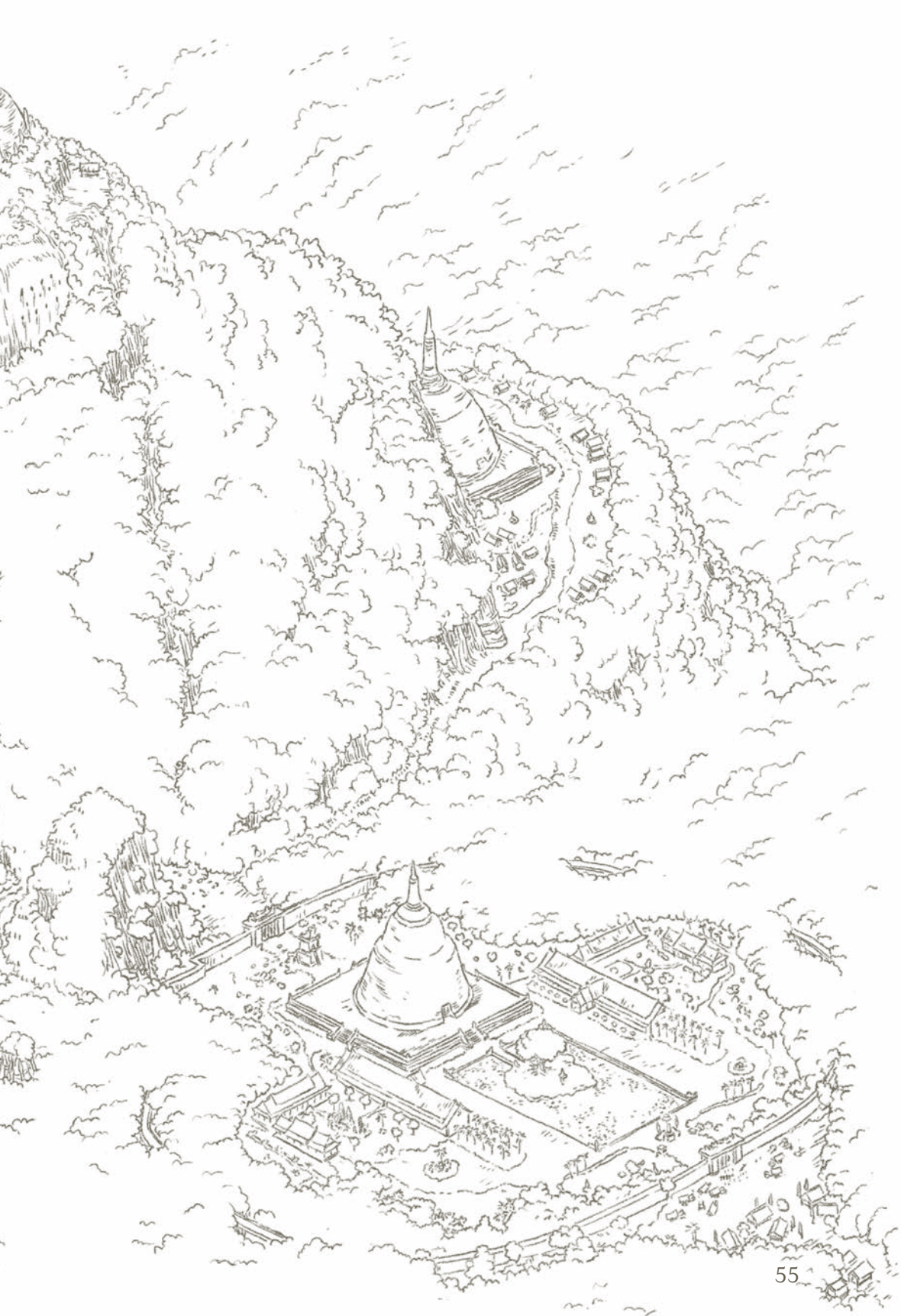


Traders crowd the guardians at the door. “Why is the Temple shut? What is going on? We came all this way. Let us in!”

The guardians cross their glaives. “Apologies,” says one, in a brass voice. “But no,” says the other.



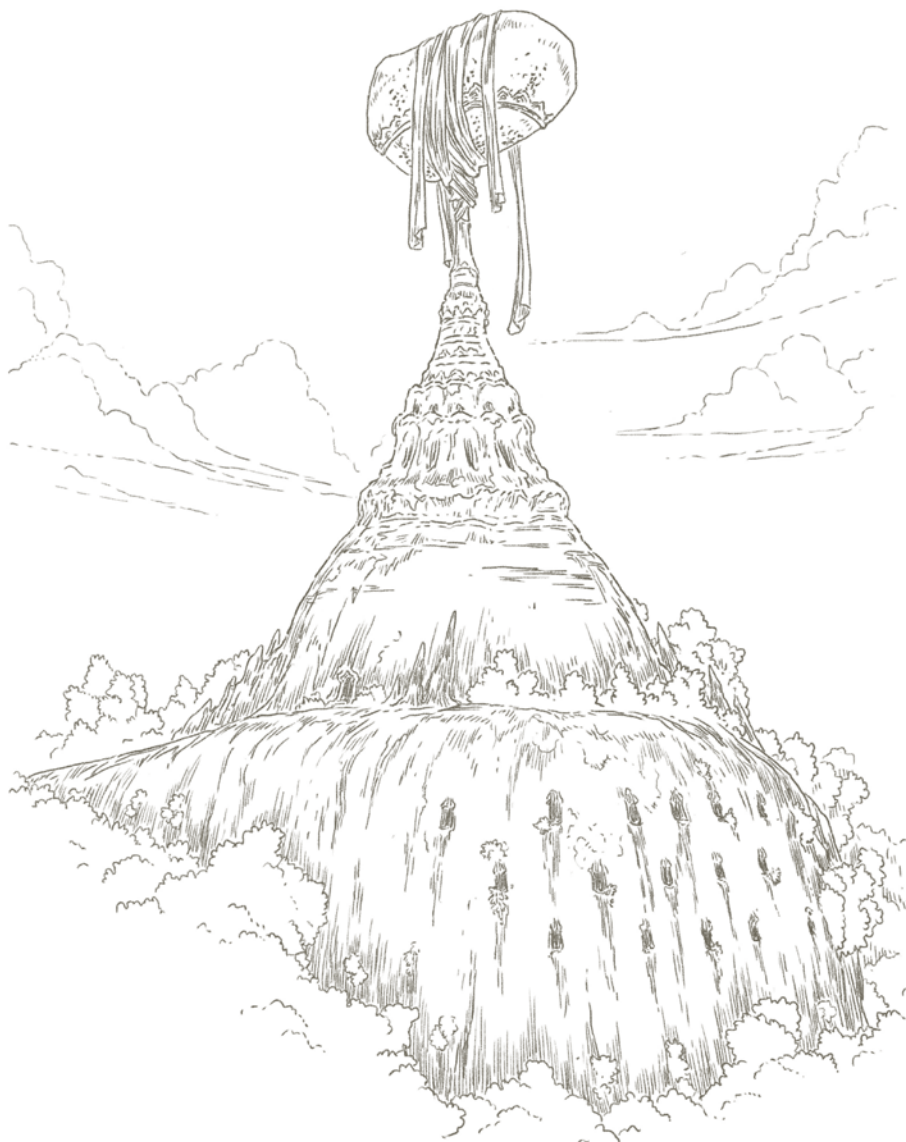




# THE TEMPLE ON SPIDER MOUNTAIN

UDARAVA'S second-most sacred shrine. In the mountain's belly he romanced the demon VIGOROUS SPIDER. Together they attained heaven.

And when they did Vigorous Spider cut off her head, setting it on the mountain's summit, so it would guide others. HER HEAD BECAME SISTER BOULDER<sup>(P100)</sup>: the Temple's founder.

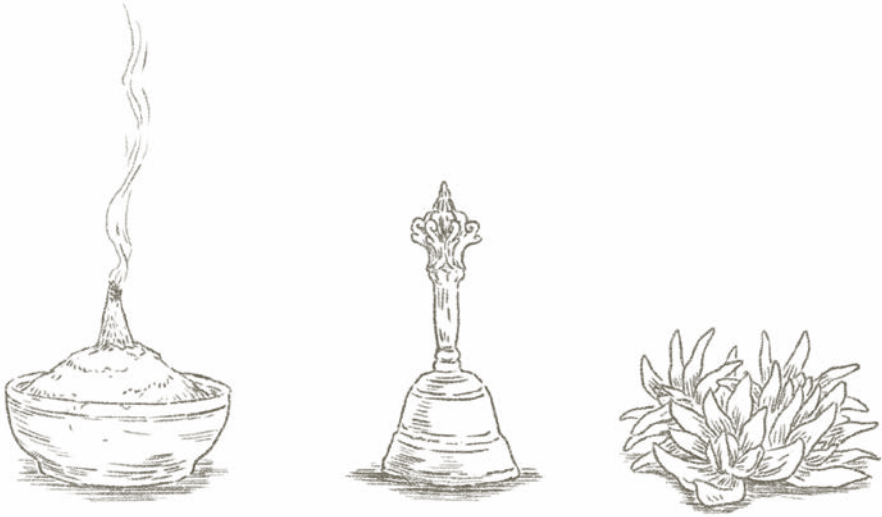




# RULES OF THE TEMPLE

All must abide by the Temple's proscriptions.

IN ORDER OF PRIORITY:



## ONE

A temple is a body stood against the world.

To DEFACE A TEMPLE GUARDIAN is to  
open a wound in its skin.

## TWO

A temple is a lake reflecting heaven.

To RAISE A VOICE IN PASSION is to shatter  
its sublime reflection.

## THREE

A temple is a jar of purest milk.

To SPILL THE BLOOD OF THE LIVING is to  
urinate into its pristine cream.

## YQJR BUSINESS AT THE TEMPLE

Why have you come? One of you has a BRASS TABLET,  
marked with your purpose.

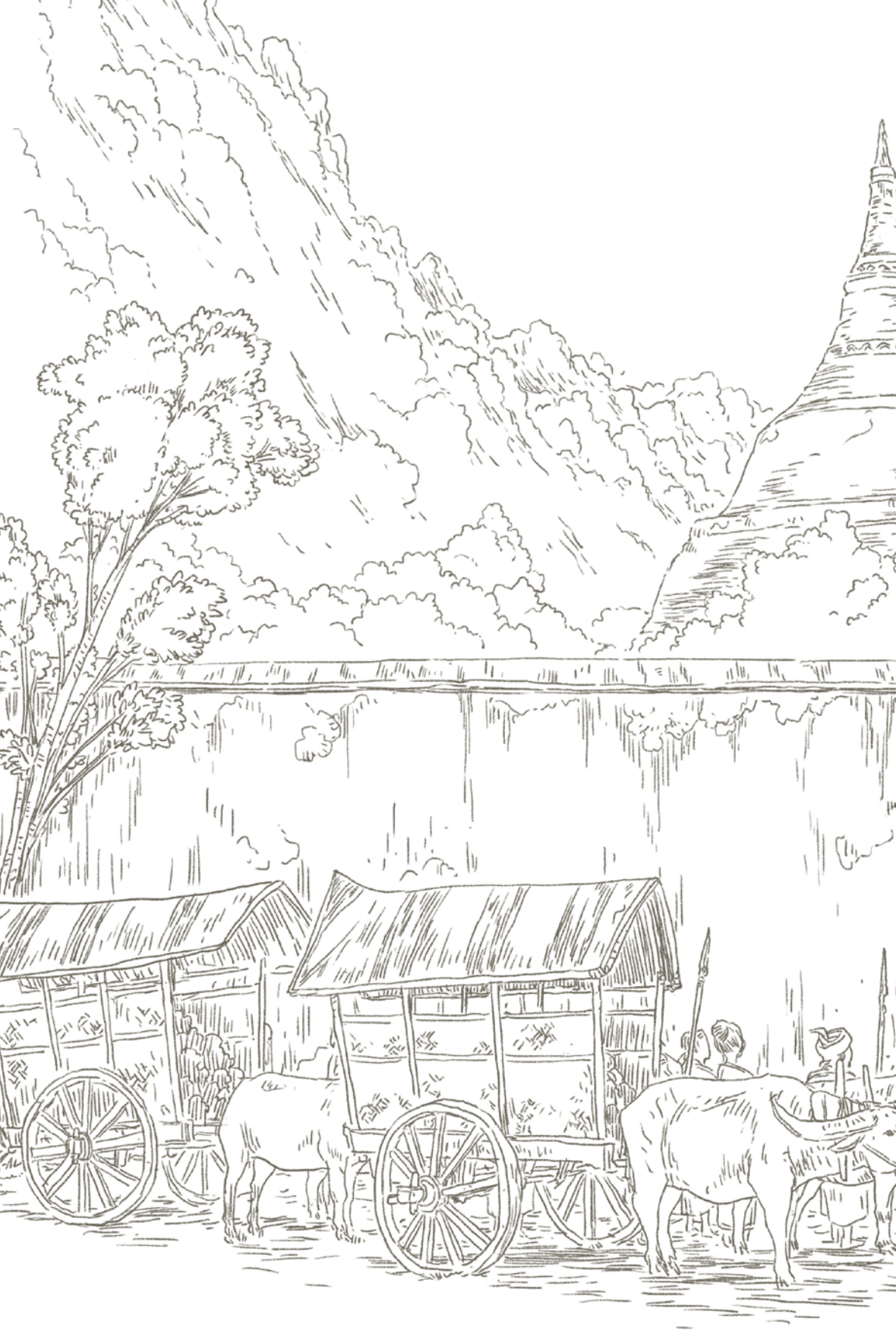


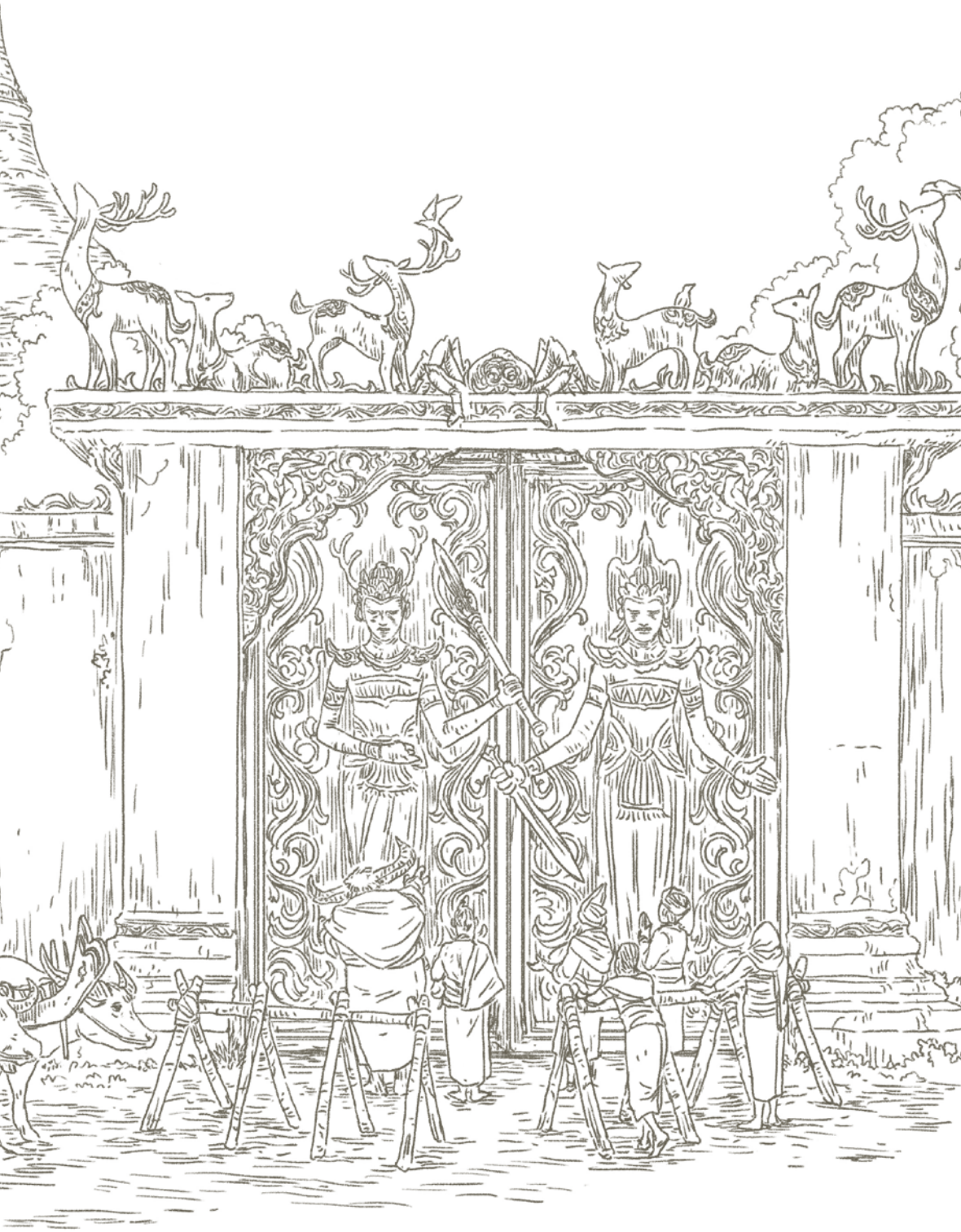
DOOR GUARDIANS<sup>[P64]</sup> will allow you into places  
relevant to this purpose:

- 1 A consultation. With OTHIP RAVA KHIM<sup>[P69]</sup>, master of the DEER SCHOOL. You have a curse that needs curing. How does this curse debilitate you?  
~~~~~
- 2 A duel to first blood. You were challenged by ATTA RHWISAU<sup>[P83]</sup>, master of the COUCAL SCHOOL. How did you come to outrage his sense of honour?  
~~~~~
- 3 A stone idol. In need of repairs from TOPTA SOKRAW<sup>[P104]</sup>, master of the BOULDER SCHOOL. Who is the god in stone you carry? What caused them harm?  
~~~~~
- 4 A letter. Signed by a princess, addressed to KUNTI BRAK<sup>[P92]</sup>, master of the SPIDER SCHOOL. Who is this princess? Why does she need a monk's help?  
~~~~~
- 5 A dead monk. You carry their ashes in an urn. Dying, they took your hand: "You must plant me in the FOREST HALL<sup>[P84]</sup>, with my brothers and sisters."  
~~~~~
- 6 A test. A priest saw Udarava's light within you. You must sit with SISTER BOULDER<sup>[P100]</sup>; she will decide whether you are her god come again.  
~~~~~









## TRADERS AT THE DOOR

Their CARTS line the road. The Temple is shut, to them.  
But you have a BRASS TABLET, and will be let in.

Who asks for your help, first?


- 1 MANSÁ. Snorts at every sentence. CART OF SANDALWOOD JOSS. "I'll leave the stuff right here, no problem." Snort. "But what about my silver?"  
~~~~~
- 2 KHUKU. Stuttering buffalo-woman. CART OF DURIANS. "I p-put all my savings in this run! W-what will I do now? I've got s-seven sons to feed!"  
~~~~~
- 3 BAYUNG SOW. Neck heavy with amulets. CART OF OLD CLOTHES. "Donations from my village. What do I tell them? Their virtue's gone to waste?"  
~~~~~
- 4 WIK SAT. Wrinkly thin. CART OF SQUID INK. "A massage at the Deer School is the only thing that fixes my back." Secretly a LEECH TEMPLE SPY.  
~~~~~
- 5 DHWE LUNGOR. Babirusa-man guard. Tarnished spear. "MY SISTER'S CLOISTERED WITH THE SPIDER SCHOOL. They won't say whether she's okay."  
~~~~~
- 6 BAKHTI SAN BONG. Snooty caravan leader. REINFORCED WAGON. "They've got gold relics in there. Jewels. Wonder if those need safekeeping?"  
~~~~~







## DOOR GUARDIANS

 *Powerful. Hale. Song arts, theology, haggling.  
Glaive. Brass skin, brass forearm.*


Buxom facsimiles of Sacred Deer in high-relief brass.  
WILL ONLY ALLOW YOU INTO PLACES RELEVANT TO YOUR  
BRASS TABLET'S STATED PURPOSE.

May meld mercury-like through their teak doors to  
face either side. Metallophone voices. They speak in  
turn. "The Temple." "Is shut to layfolk." "You will find  
a way." "We believe in you!"

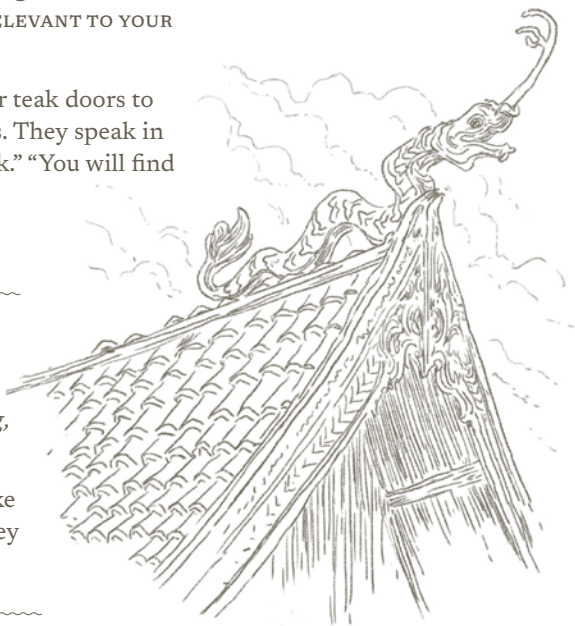
NOT SUBJECT TO TEMPLE RULES.

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## LITTLE GUARDIANS

 *Ordinary. Hale. Nibbling, watching,  
fleeing. Sharp edges. Brass skin.*

Garish paint on metal. They move like  
voguing dancers. They like roofs. They  
TRAVERSE WALLS LIKE LEVEL GROUND.



They act as their likenesses:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1 SACRED DEER. Coddles.<br>You-can-do-it cheerleading,<br>regardless of the situation. | 4 VIGOROUS SPIDER. Stalks. They<br>lunge. They surprise you with<br>an amorous hug.    |
| 2 LAUGHING SERPENT. Teases.<br>Grabs something from you.<br>Stashes it out of reach.   | 5 EAGER PERCH. Begg. They are<br>hungry for money. Their belly<br>rattles with coin.   |
| 3 HUMBLE COUCAL. Disapproves.<br>Settles nearby loudly criticise<br>your decisions.    | 6 FOOLISH DOG. Pants. They<br>want to please. Their help will<br>get you into trouble. |

NOT SUBJECT TO TEMPLE RULES.

If damaged, they flee to the SCULPTING WORKSHOP<sup>(P102)</sup>.

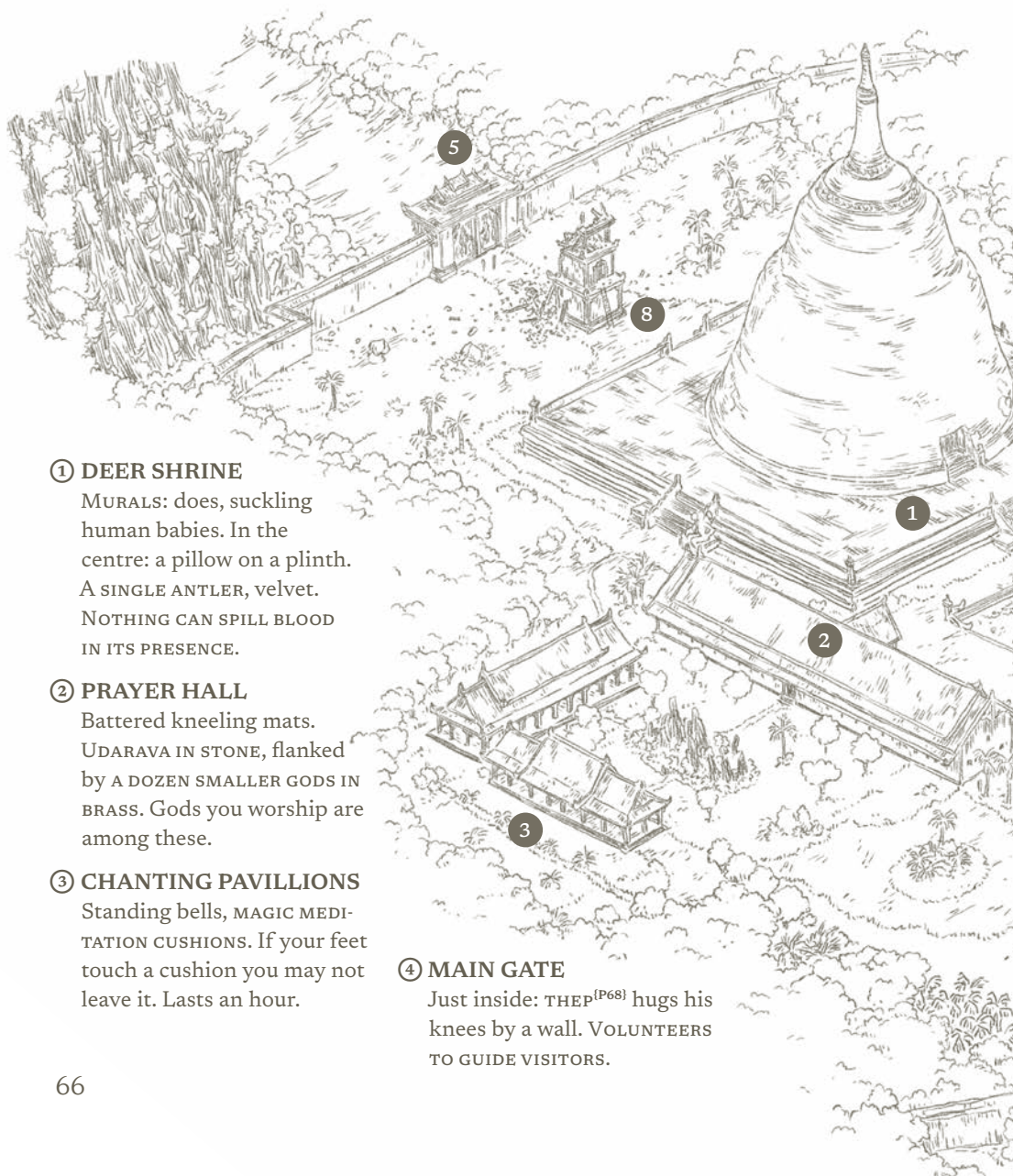


# PRECINCT OF THE DEER

SACRED DEER was Udarava's mother, the saint of lush generosity. Most layfolk come to the Temple seeking her grace.

When you first enter: commotion. MONKS HURRY NORTHWARDS. There is the sound of exploding masonry.

As your approach the BELL TOWER: an ugly peal; a teak bell-clapper helicopters in your direction.



## ① DEER SHRINE

MURALS: does, suckling human babies. In the centre: a pillow on a plinth. A SINGLE ANTLER, velvet. NOTHING CAN SPILL BLOOD IN ITS PRESENCE.

## ② PRAYER HALL

Battered kneeling mats. UDARAVA IN STONE, flanked by A DOZEN SMALLER GODS IN BRASS. Gods you worship are among these.

## ③ CHANTING PAVILLIONS

Standing bells, MAGIC MEDITATION CUSHIONS. If your feet touch a cushion you may not leave it. Lasts an hour.

## ④ MAIN GATE

Just inside: THEP<sup>(P68)</sup> hugs his knees by a wall. VOLUNTEERS TO GUIDE VISITORS.

**⑤ INNER GATE**

A battered ROACH GUARDIAN<sup>[P106]</sup> flees. MISSING AN ARM. THE DOOR GUARDIANS<sup>[P64]</sup> let it through, swing shut behind it.

**⑥ MASSAGE HALL**

Every surface oily with liniment. For a week's wages: a MASSAGE. A monk of the Deer School contorts you into logogram-like positions. Heals all mundane WOUNDS AND DISEASES.

**⑦ MEDICINE HALLS**

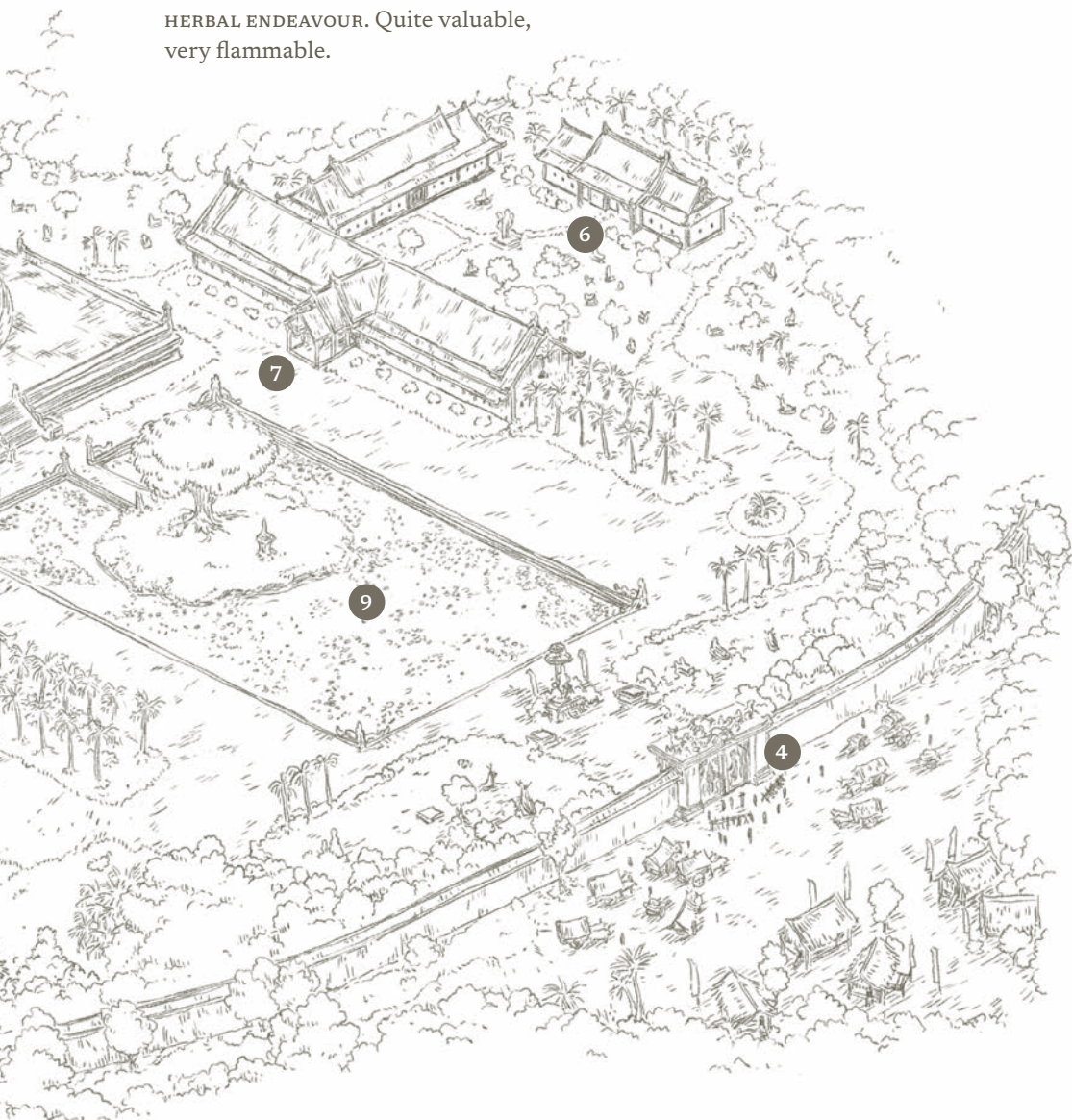
Bitter roots, boiling. Shelves of POWDERED INGREDIENTS FOR ANY HERBAL ENDEAVOUR. Quite valuable, very flammable.

**⑧ BELL TOWER**

ATTA RHWISAU<sup>[P83]</sup> pulls himself from the rubble, CLUTCHING A SEVERED STONE ARM. "This has gone too far. I have broken Temple rules," he says. He tosses the arm, leaves for the PRECINCT OF THE COUCAL<sup>[P80]</sup>.

**⑨ REFLECTING POOL**

Lilies. In the middle: a teak bridge, an island—a VENERABLE TAMARIND. Food cooked with its fruit never poison you. Under its shade: OTHIP RAVA KHIM<sup>[P69]</sup> pounds tamarind paste.







## “THEP” Junior Monk

 *Ordinary. Hale. Memorising, eavesdropping, climbing.*  
 *Shovel. Jade amulet.*

Smells of sewage. As pensive as the middle child of quarrelling parents.

Has a crush on MASTER SOKRAW<sup>[P104]</sup>. “This isn’t him! Some evil entity must be wearing his skin. You must help me save him!”

Dozing off at his lessons, Thep was assigned latrine duty a lot. This is how he discovered the SWEAT BATH’S HIDDEN ENTRANCE<sup>[P80]</sup> to UDARAVA’S STAIR<sup>[P109]</sup>.



## “OTHIP RAVA KHAM” Deer School Master

*Extraordinary. Frail. Poultrice arts, gardening,  
pickling. Exsanguinating bite. Unprotected.*

Permanent pout. As sweaty and anxious as your loudest aunt.

Taught horticulture and healing arts. Never eats in the company of others. Secretly a LEECH TEMPLE SPY; when exposed, Khim’s lips twist into three serrated jaws.

She pretends to worry. Her delay is predatory. When the other masters fight she will ROB THE RELIC HALL <sup>{P86}</sup>.  
How unscrupulous are you? She needs accomplices.

# THE TEMPLE DIVIDED



## TWO DAYS AGO

TOPTA SOKRAW<sup>{P104}</sup>, master of the Boulder School, pronounces new wisdom—the god Udarava did not wed a spider, but a roach. He and his disciples retreat to the mountain-top. They are the ROACH SCHOOL<sup>{P101}</sup>, now.

## ONE DAY AGO

The other masters declare the Temple shut. LAYFOLK SHOULD NOT ENTER; NOBODY MAY LEAVE. Topta's teachings must not spread. That night: Topta transforms his school's STONE GUARDIAN<sup>{P75}</sup> into a ROACH GUARDIAN<sup>{P106}</sup>.

## THIS MORNING

The roach guardian attacks the PRECINCT OF THE DEER<sup>{P66}</sup>. ATTA RHWISAU<sup>{P83}</sup>, master of the COUCAL SCHOOL, duels and defeats it. THE ROACH GUARDIAN RETREATS TO THE PRECINCT OF THE BOULDER<sup>{P102}</sup>.







## TEMPLE MONKS

*Ordinary. Hale. Fasting, memorising, dancing. Staff. Meditation-hardened skin.*

Shaved heads, robes stitched from donated clothes. Prone to bowing.

Slow speech, to seem serene. They are anything but. TOPTA SOKRAW'S TEACHINGS HAS THEM SHOOK. If they trust you it all comes out.

---

This one is hyper-fixating on:

- 1 BLAME. The masters were meant to guide us. This disharmony is their failure. A CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP may be wiser.
  - 2 DOUBT. Could the roach cultists be right? Look at SISTER BOULDER, A-CRAWL WITH VERMIN<sup>{P100}</sup>. That she allows this—it's a sign.
  - 3 BETRAYAL. The blasphemers shared our broth and bowls. Are they still among us? LET'S SEE YOUR HEAD! Got any dents?
  - 4 ESCAPE. Udarava will not forgive such impiety, and will wipe this sin clean. THE RIGHTEOUS SHOULD LEAVE! Return later.
  - 5 VIOLENCE. Why do we train with weapons, if we cannot use them? We should be allowed to STOMP ON ROACHES, at least!
  - 6 SISTER SING, LOVELY SISTER SING<sup>{P93}</sup>, in seclusion with the Spider, asleep in her cocoon. Is she in trouble? WE MUST GO SEE!
-

# FOUR SCHOLS



The Temple is divided into four precincts, four schools. Senior monks pick a school as they might a college major:

## DEER SCHOL

A monk belonging to the Deer School is skilled in HERB-LORE OR ACUPRESSURE. They wear a CLOTH HAT HEXED TO STAND, as antlers.

OTHIP RAVA KHIM<sup>[P69]</sup> is master of the Deer School.

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## COUCAL SCHOL

A monk belonging to the Coucal School is skilled in ANIMAL-WISDOM OR STAFF ARTS. They don DYED-BROWN SLEEVES, as wings.

ATTA RHWISAU<sup>[P83]</sup> is master of the Coucal School.

---

## SPIDER SCHQOL

A monk belonging to the Spider School is skilled in SERICULTURE OR DISPUTATION. They put on SILK SKIRTS they've spun themselves.

KUNTI BRAK<sup>[P92]</sup> is master of the Spider School.

---





## BQULDER SCHQOL

A monk belonging to the Boulder School is skilled in MEDITATION OR STONEMWORKING. They TATTOO THEIR ARMS with solid colour.

Most have followed their master TOPTA SOKRAW<sup>[P104]</sup> in declaring for the ROACH SCHOOL<sup>[P101]</sup>.

---

# STONE GUARDIAN MOVEMENTS

They embody the monks' ultimate aim: the peace and poise of stone. There were four—one for each school. Now there are THREE STONE GUARDIANS  , and ONE ROACH GUARDIAN  {P106}.

## STARTING LOCATIONS

Precinct of the Spider:       Forest Hall:   
Precinct of the Boulder:       Rice Hall: 

They follow an ineffable pattern. Roll for each, every morning; this one is moving to the:










- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 Precinct of the Deer <sup>{P66}</sup> .   | 4 Forest Hall <sup>{P84}</sup> .              |
| ~~~~~                                       | ~~~~~   |
| 2 Precinct of the Spider <sup>{P90}</sup> . | 5 Rice Hall <sup>{P98}</sup> .                |
| ~~~~~                                       | ~~~~~   |
| 3 Precinct of the Coucal <sup>{P80}</sup> . | 6 Precinct of the Boulder <sup>{P102}</sup> . |
| ~~~~~                                       | ~~~~~   |

Those that enter the Precinct of the Boulder are lured to the SCULPTING WORKSHOP<sup>{P102}</sup>.

## STONE GUARDIAN CORRUPTION

TOPTA SOKRAW<sup>{P104}</sup> FIXES ANY STONE GUARDIANS  waiting in the Sculpting Workshop, transforming them into ROACH GUARDIANS .

Balance in the Temple shifts as MORE ROACH GUARDIANS EXIST, and THESE EVENTS OCCUR:

- TWO ROACH GUARDIANS ~~~~~    
A SWARM OF ROACHES ERUPT FROM THE RICE PASSAGE<sup>{P98}</sup>.  
They INFEST THE FOOD STORES.
- THREE ROACH GUARDIANS ~~~~~     
KUNTI BRAK<sup>{P92}</sup> marches to the BOULDER GATE<sup>{P102}</sup>.  
She is admitted. THE ROACH CULT CONVERTS HER.
- FOUR ROACH GUARDIANS ~~~~~      
ATTA RHWISAU<sup>{P83}</sup> leads the Coucal School on a violent assault against the Roach School. BOTH RHWISAU AND TOPTA PERISH.  
The WIZARD IN WHITE<sup>{P110}</sup> takes over.



## STONE GUARDIANS

*Powerful. Hale. Spear-craft, dancing, grappling.  
Six fists. Stone forearms, stone shins.*

Anthropomorphised versions of Vigorous Spider. Their mouths scowl. They do not speak.

Three heads, three torsos, two legs. They move like stop-motion monsters.

Each is different; this one has:

**1** MIRRORS on each forehead. These REFLECT ALL SPELLS.

**4** A RHINO MOUNT. Its HORN BREAKS BONE WITH A TOUCH.

**2** A CROWN on each head, shaped like stupas. GOLD.

**5** WINGS on their backs. Stone, stubby and USELESS.

**3** TUSKS like a boar. They SPIT FLESHING-EATING VENOM.

**6** A RUBY on a belt. IF PRESSED TO IT YOU FALL ASLEEP.

Four pairs of eyes, four noses. To them, those who break Temple rules stink of rotting corpses. WILL PURSUE AND PUNISH ANY RULEBREAKERS THEY SCENT.  
Their punishments always draw blood.

NOT SUBJECT TO TEMPLE RULES. If damaged, they deal with remaining sinners, then stomp up to the SCULPTING WORKSHOP.

# TRAVEL IN TEMPLE GROUNDS

WORN-STONE PATHS between major Temple sections take a HALF-HOUR. Off these paths the footing is steep; the forest tangled. It is a FULL DAY'S TRAVEL BETWEEN UNCONNECTED LOCATIONS. Lots of fruit trees.

① PRECINCT OF THE BOULDER<sup>[P102]</sup>

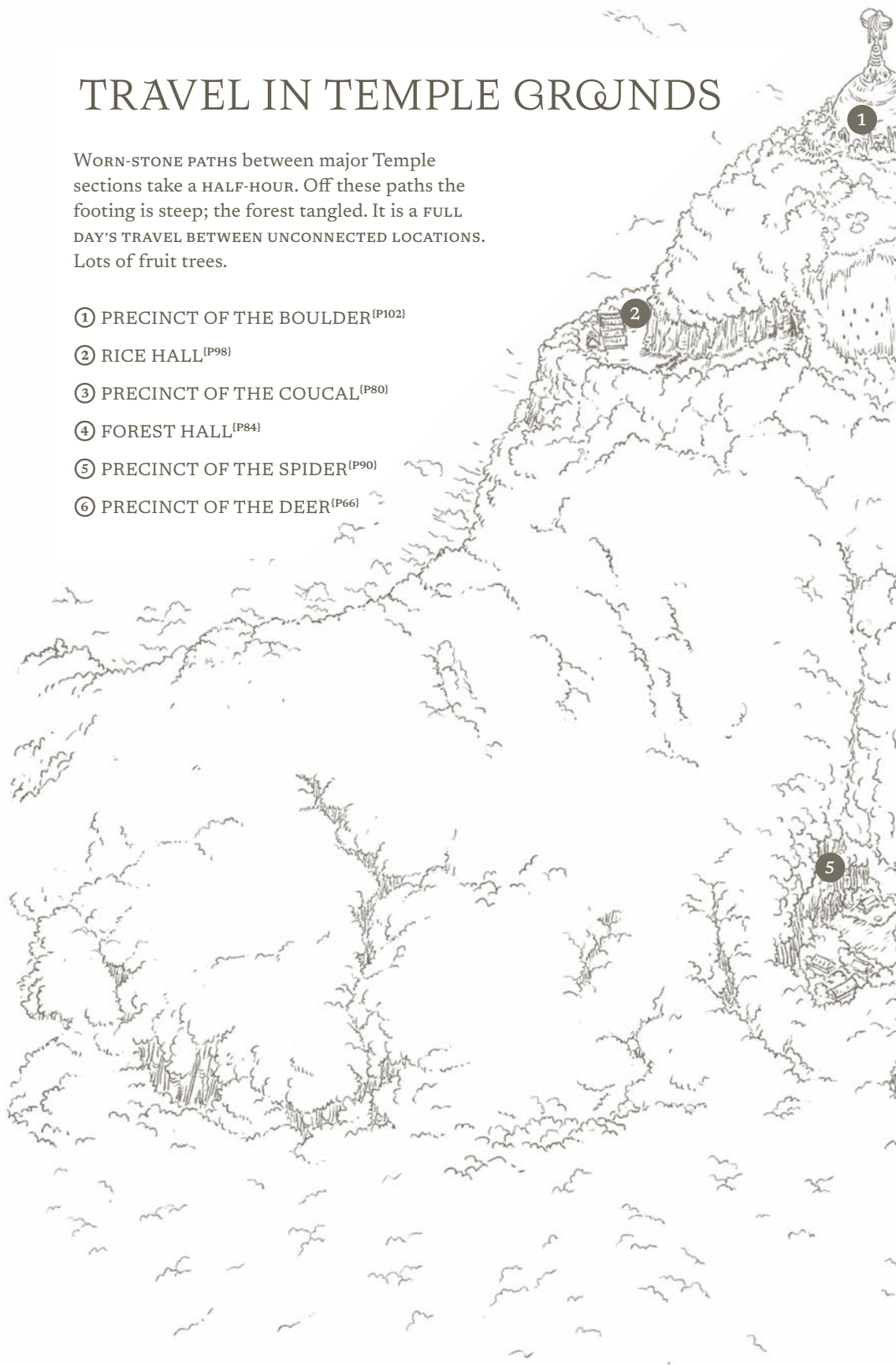
② RICE HALL<sup>[P98]</sup>

③ PRECINCT OF THE COUCAL<sup>[P80]</sup>

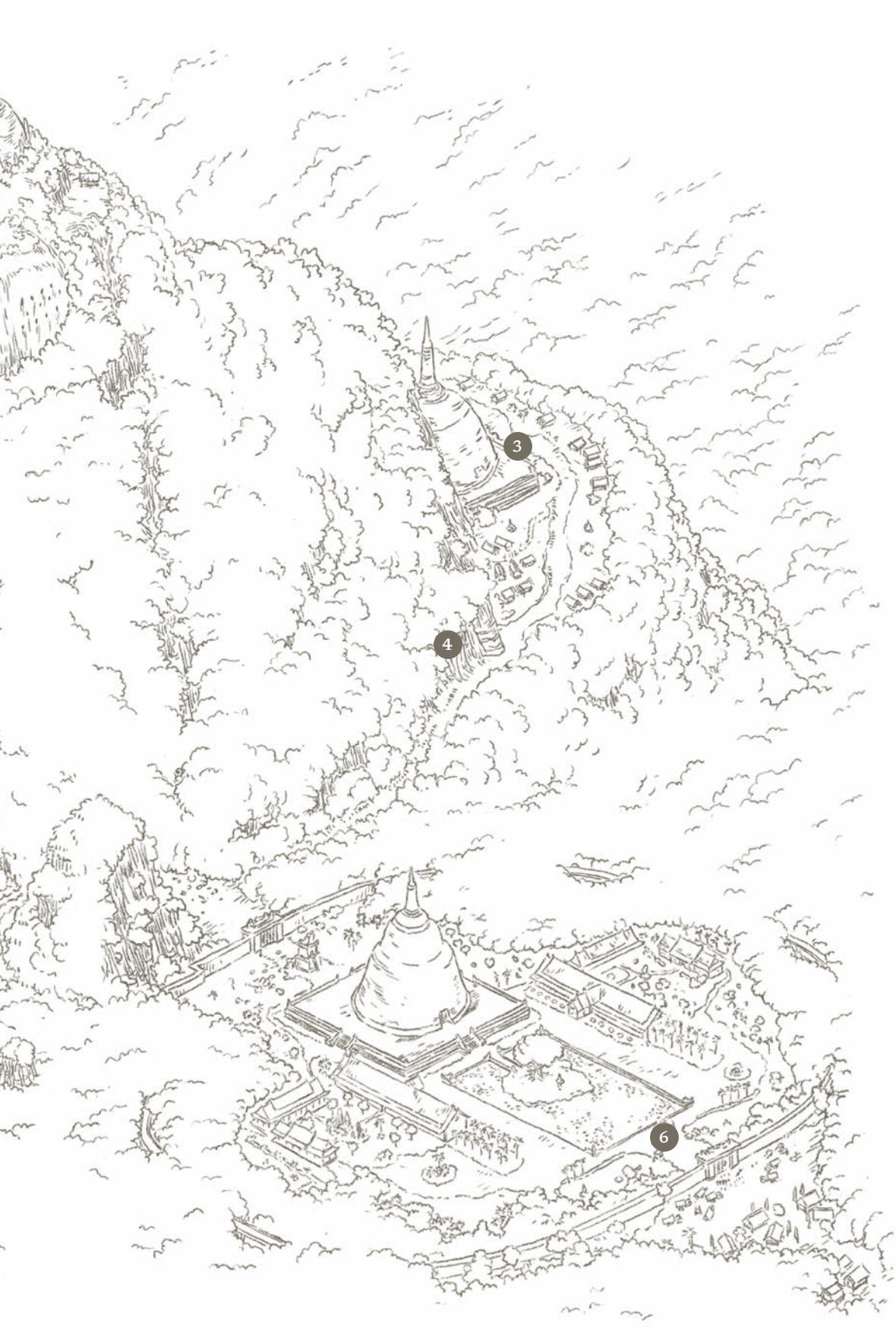
④ FOREST HALL<sup>[P84]</sup>

⑤ PRECINCT OF THE SPIDER<sup>[P90]</sup>

⑥ PRECINCT OF THE DEER<sup>[P66]</sup>









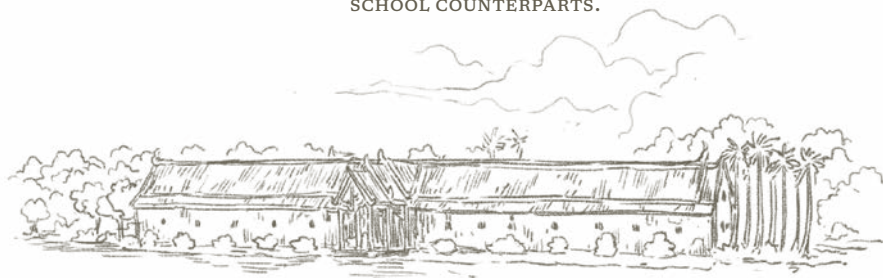
## ENCOUNTERS ABOUT THE TEMPLE

There is always something. ROLL WHEN TRAVELLING OUTSIDE THE  
PRECINCT OF THE DEER<sup>[P66]</sup>, between any significant Temple structure:

- |  |                 |  |
|--|-----------------|--|
| 1 A draft, damp off the mountain, making you shiver                          | 1 Rushing to    | 1 A disconcerting pause in all sounds. A whine begins in your ears.          |
| 2 Three LITTLE GUARDIANS <sup>[P64]</sup> , in a line, of varying shapes     | 2 Tracking      | 2 Two CATS, belled and collared, yowling at each other.                      |
| 3 A pair of ROACH SCHOOL MONKS <sup>[P105]</sup> , shushing themselves       | 3 Fleeing from  | 3 A LITTLE ROACH GUARDIAN <sup>[P106]</sup> , buzzing like a delivery drone. |
| 4 The WEBBING SPIRIT <sup>[P95]</sup> , toppling over like a bundled corpse. | 4 Surprising    | 4 BRINTI BOW'S DAUGHTER <sup>[P87]</sup> , book satchel on her shoulder.     |
| 5 A JUNIOR MONK <sup>[P71]</sup> , crying—this has been all too much         | 5 In the way of | 5 A pair of SENIOR MONKS, different schools, carrying supplies.              |
| 6 ROACHES! A living carpet, black ones and red ones—and white ones           | 6 Annoying      | 6 Cold light. The ghost of THREE EYE SPIDER <sup>[P94]</sup> , beckoning.    |

Nearby STONE GUARDIANS<sup>[P75]</sup> and ROACH GUARDIANS<sup>[P106]</sup>  
will always investigate audible commotion.

If an encounter takes place within the PRECINCT OF THE BOULDER<sup>[P102]</sup>,  
monks and little guardians are REPLACED BY THEIR ROACH  
SCHOOL COUNTERPARTS.



# HOUSES OF THE TEMPLE

The Temple is a town unto itself.  
UNLABELLED STRUCTURES ARE DWELLINGS.

This one is:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 Wood, stilts, painted in three colours.   | 1 A GOD'S HOME. Brass. FOOD OFFERED TO THEM DOES NOT SPOIL.                             |
| 2 The wide hollow of an ancient TREE TRUNK. | 2 A MINOR SAINT'S SHRINE. Teak. Decorated with GOLD BRACELETS.                          |
| 3 Rooms cut into the LIMESTONE hillside.    | 3 A MASTER'S MANSE. Some spare robes, folded. ALARM HEX.                                |
| 4 A LEAN-TO with a carved ivory facade.     | 4 A SENIOR MONK'S HOUSE. Extra TOOLS, pertinent to their school.                        |
| 5 The RUIN of an old shrine, repaired.      | 5 A JUNIOR MONK'S DORM. Folded LETTERS, apologies to family members.                    |
| 6 BRICK, blanketed in vines, dirt floor.    | 6 FOR GUESTS. Linen folded neat. Sour odour. LITTLE GUARDIAN <sup>[P64]</sup> squatter. |

SEARCH and you find:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1 PAPER TALISMANS, under a cot. RED INK: prevents bad dreams. SEPIA INK: repels ghostly spirits. | 4 A DIARY, in a prayer book. Details torrid, increasingly WET DREAMS STARRING A ROACH-FACED HUNK.             |
| 2 A SMALL JAR, wrapped in rags. FISH SAUCE, spicy, thick; opened, its aroma overpowers a room.   | 5 MOONSHINE, behind a stool. DRINK and you hear SISTER BOULDER <sup>[P100]</sup> talking. SHE CALLS FOR HELP. |
| 3 DRESSES, in a trunk. SILK brocade, two-headed crane motif. The emblem of a lowlander royal.    | 6 A toy, under a pillow. IVORY PHALLUS. Its length carved with sumptuous women fucking tigers.                |

# PRECINCT OF THE COUCAL

HUMBLE COUCAL was Udarava's bosom sister, the saint of fruitful rivalry.  
Her precinct is a fortress abutting the mountain.

## ① FOREST CAVE

Passage to the FOREST GATE<sup>[P84]</sup>.

## ② COUCAL SHRINE

MURALS: birds in the eye sockets  
of kneeling giants. In the centre:  
a pillow on a plinth. An ARROW  
fletched with coucal feathers.  
KILLS ANY CREATURE IT PIERCES.  
No exceptions. ONE USE.

## ③ BIRD GATE

Potty-mouthed DOOR GUARDIANS<sup>[P64]</sup>.  
They make the monks blush.

## ④ WHITE FALLS

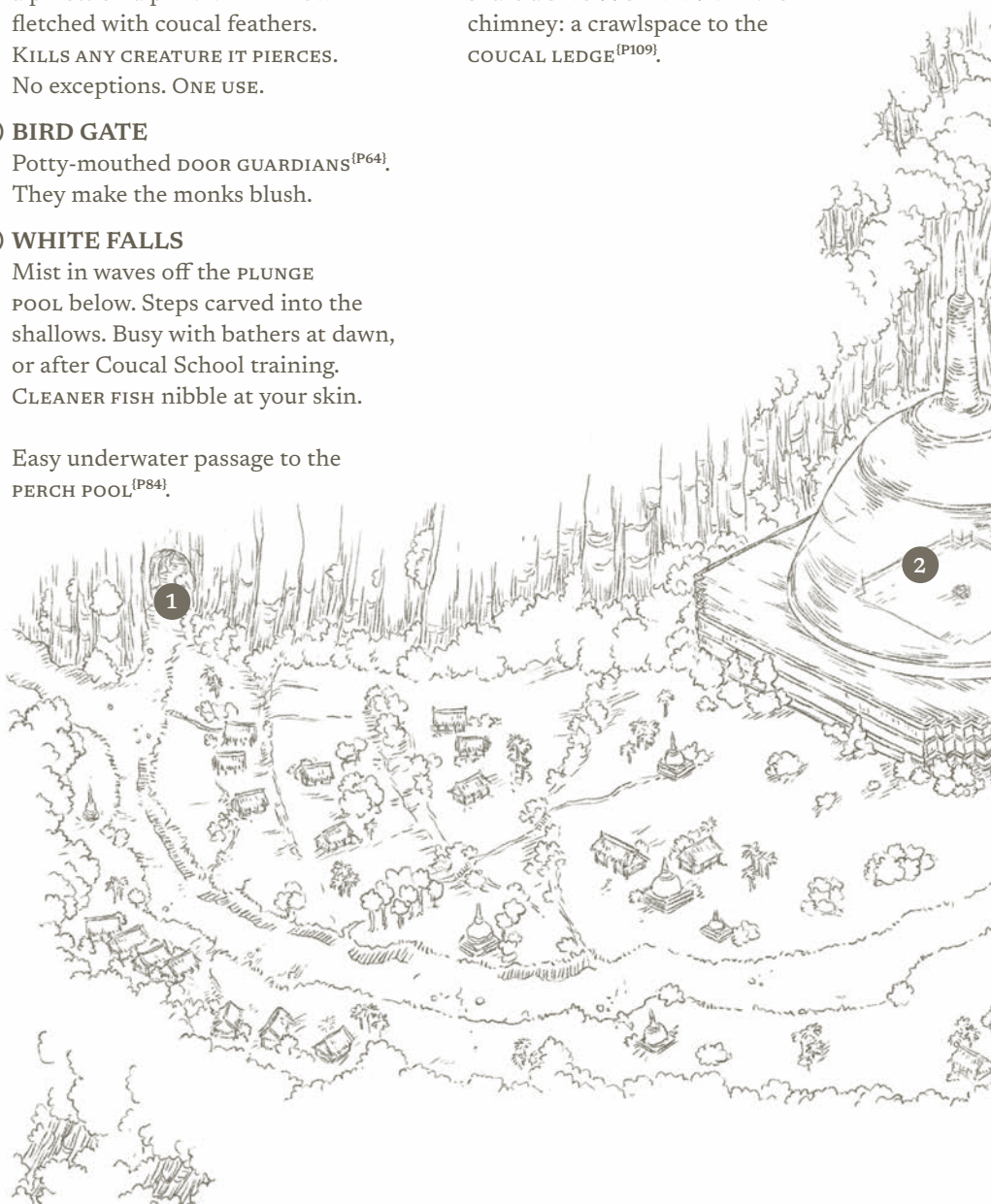
Mist in waves off the PLUNGE  
POOL below. Steps carved into the  
shallows. Busy with bathers at dawn,  
or after Coucal School training.  
CLEANER FISH nibble at your skin.

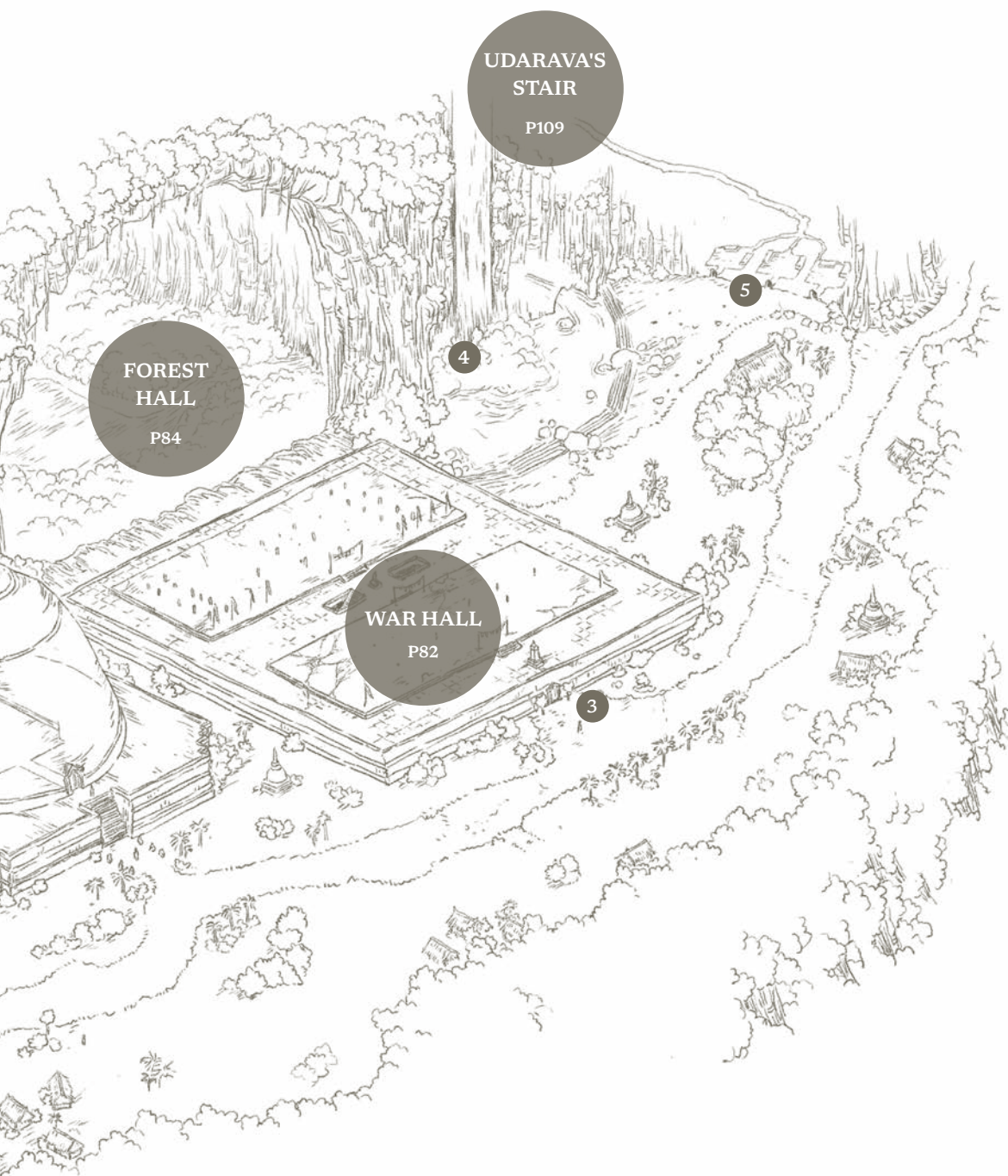
Easy underwater passage to the  
PERCH POOL<sup>[P84]</sup>.

## ⑤ SWEAT BATHS

Walled-up rock shelters. EYE-  
SMARTING STEAM. Cisterns: water  
flavoured by kaffir lime and flowers.

Stoves to heat the stones. These  
share a SINGLE CHIMNEY. In the  
chimney: a crawlspace to the  
COUCAL LEDGE<sup>[P109]</sup>.





UDARAVA'S  
STAIR

P109

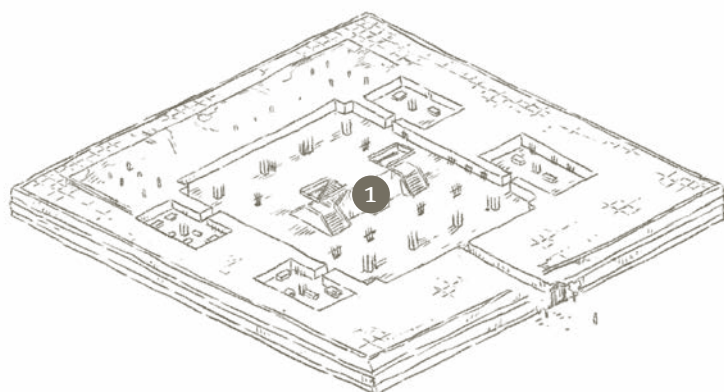
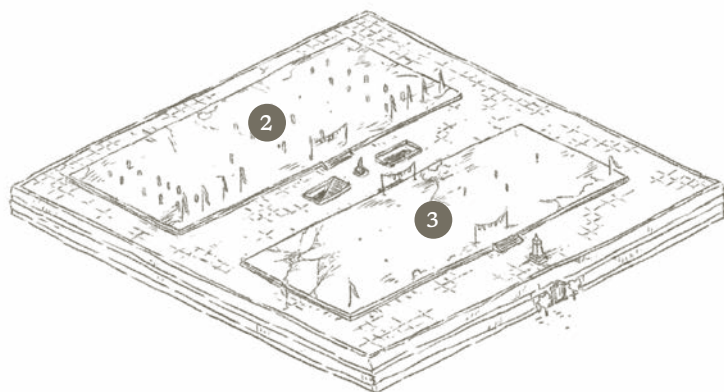
FOREST  
HALL

P84

WAR HALL

P82

# WAR HALL



## ① WAR HALL

Rows, racks: clubs, UNSHARPENED SPEARS, SWORDS. In private rooms, on cushions, bathed and oiled daily:

- ☞ SRI KHUM. A sickle. Terrible puns. His stab victims laugh a full hour.
- ☞ ADNATRI. A mace. Dutiful. At will, weighs as heavy as an elephant.
- ☞ TUNG ARIFA. A spear. Apologetic. Any creature touching her starts to drown.

Steps up to the BALL YARD and EXERCISE YARD.

## ② EXERCISE YARD

PUNCHING DUMMIES, Mornings: sparring monks. ATTA RHWISAU watches and barks orders. “Too slow.” “Don’t think so much.” “Too fast.”

## ③ BALL YARD

Cracked stones. Evenings: playing monks. They will challenge you to GAMES:

- ☞ ONE-WITH-AIR. Juggle a rattan ball with your feet. The record: three days.
- ☞ LOWLANDER WAR. Basically kick volleyball. With balls of solid granite.





“ATTA RHWISAU”  
Coucal School Master

Powerful. Hale. War arts, surgery, stargazing. Heart-stopping kick. Meditation-steeled skin, golden amulet.

White eyebrows. As curt as the father whose approval you could never win.

Taught the killing arts. He is a hammer. This Roach School is a nail. WILL BREAK TEMPLE RULES, TO STOP THE ROACHES. If the stone guardians punish him—so be it.

IN LOVE WITH BRINTI BOW'S DAUGHTER<sup>[P87]</sup>. Will never admit this. But will murder those who do her harm.

---

# FOREST HALL

Cathedral-sized cavity in the mountain's belly. DIRECT SUNLIGHT FROM DAWN TO NOON. Palms and macarangas, tall yellow merantis; houses in the trees.

## ① RELIC GATE

The DOOR GUARDIANS<sup>[P64]</sup> turn all away, except for BRINTI BOW'S DAUGHTER<sup>[P87]</sup>.

## ② SUN GATE

Doline. Easily accessible from the War Hall's EXERCISE YARD<sup>[P82]</sup>—a ten-storey vertical climb.

## ③ PERCH POOL

The dink of fins. A school of brass fish. At sundown: LITTLE GUARDIANS<sup>[P64]</sup> in the shape of Eager Perch return here. THEIR BELLIES STORE THE TEMPLE'S COIN WEALTH.

Fed by the WHITE FALLS<sup>[P80]</sup>. Current takes you into the BLACK POOL<sup>[P109]</sup>.

## ④ URN GALLERY

Stalagmites carved into palms, macarangas, merantis. Hundreds of BURIAL URNS between the stone trees.

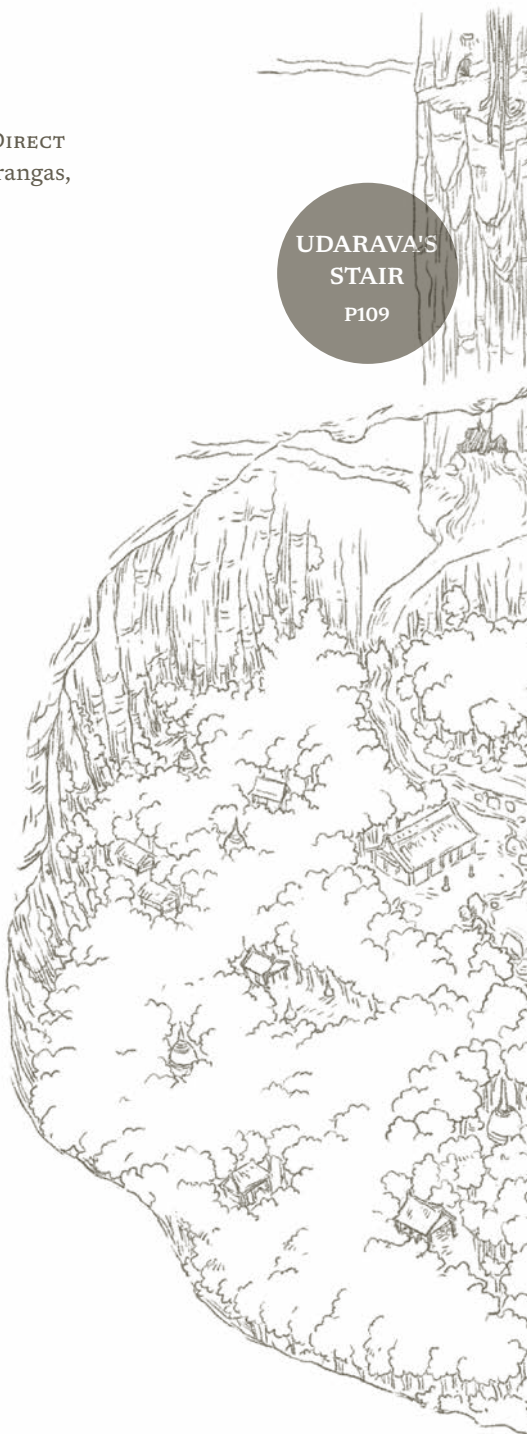
In the middle, a pile of shame—RINGS, AMULETS, JEWEL BOXES. Keepsakes the monks could not let go of, in life.

## 5 FOREST GATE

NO DOOR GUARDIANS. Curtain TAPESTRY: Udarava, battling Vigorous Spider. Passage to the FOREST CAVE<sup>[P80]</sup>.

UDARAVA'S  
STAIR

P109







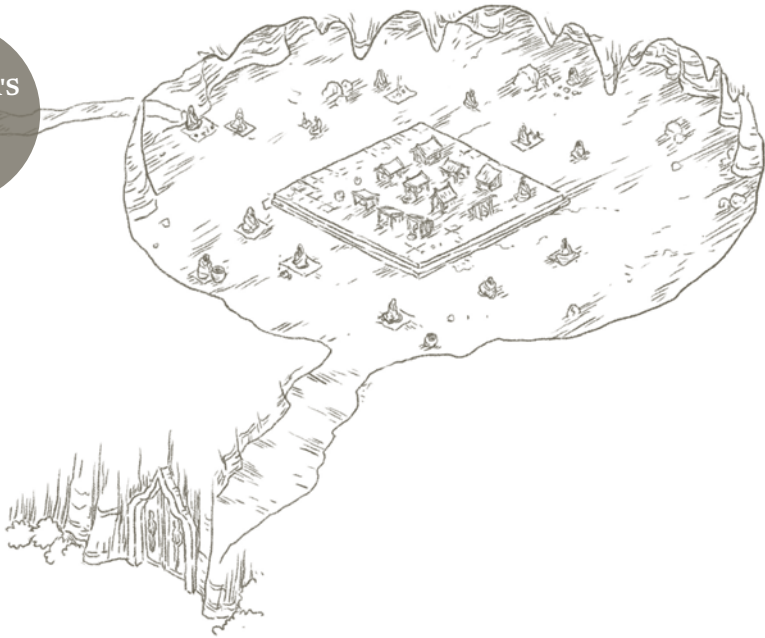
RELIC  
HALL  
P86

WAR HALL  
P82

PRECINCT  
OF THE  
COUCAL  
P80

# RELIC HALL

UDARAVA'S  
STAIR  
P109



Air still as a held breath. MONKS ESPECIALLY HOLY ARE MUMMIFIED when they die, and interred here. Notable relics:

- ☞ NING THIP BRAK, of the Coucal School. She was AS LIGHT AS A BUTTERFLY.
- ☞ APIT SAUNG, of the Spider School. HIS WHISTLING SILENCED OTHER SOUNDS.
- ☞ SRI RUANG, junior monk. THE SOLES OF THEIR FEET BURNED WITH A BLUE FIRE.
- ☞ BORN-IN-URN, of the Deer School. THEIR TOUCH BROUGHT DREAMLESS SLEEP.
- ☞ MARALAN SOFT TONGUE, of the Boulder School. BRASS OBEYED HIS VOICE.
- ☞ NENEK AW, of the Spider School. FROM HER EVERY WORD—A BLACK PEARL.

THEIR FLESH RETAINS THEIR VIRTUE. It is a privilege to grate some off, drink it as tea. YOU GAIN THEIR POWER UNTIL YOU NEXT PEE.

BRINTI BOW'S DAUGHTER is stashing books among the relics, for safety. Already here are manuals of magic: CHARM MONK; SEE THROUGH STONE; SUMMON PHLEGM SPIRIT.

Under Born-In-Urn's dais: a person-wide slide to the BLACK POOL <sup>(P109)</sup>.



## “BRINTI BOW’S DAUGHTER” Master of Stores

 *Extraordinary. Frail. Arithmetic, lute arts, humming.  
Arrows. Unprotected.*

Arched eyebrow. Aggressive sign language—all hand-chops and chest-thumps.

Her mother loved archery overmuch. Brinti cannot speak; ARROWS FORM IN HER MOUTH INSTEAD OF WORDS. She can spit these at speeds to pierce steel.

KEYS TO EVERY HALL jangle around her neck. COLLECTING BOOKS from all over the Temple, bringing them to the RELIC HALL. Books mean more to her than monks.

**UDARAVA'S  
STAIR**

P109

**PRECINCT  
OF THE  
BOULDER**

P102

**PRECINCT  
OF THE  
COUCAL**

P80

**RICE HALL**

P98

**FOREST  
HALL**

P84

**PRECINCT  
OF THE  
SPIDER**

P90



# TRAVEL UNDER THE MOUNTAIN

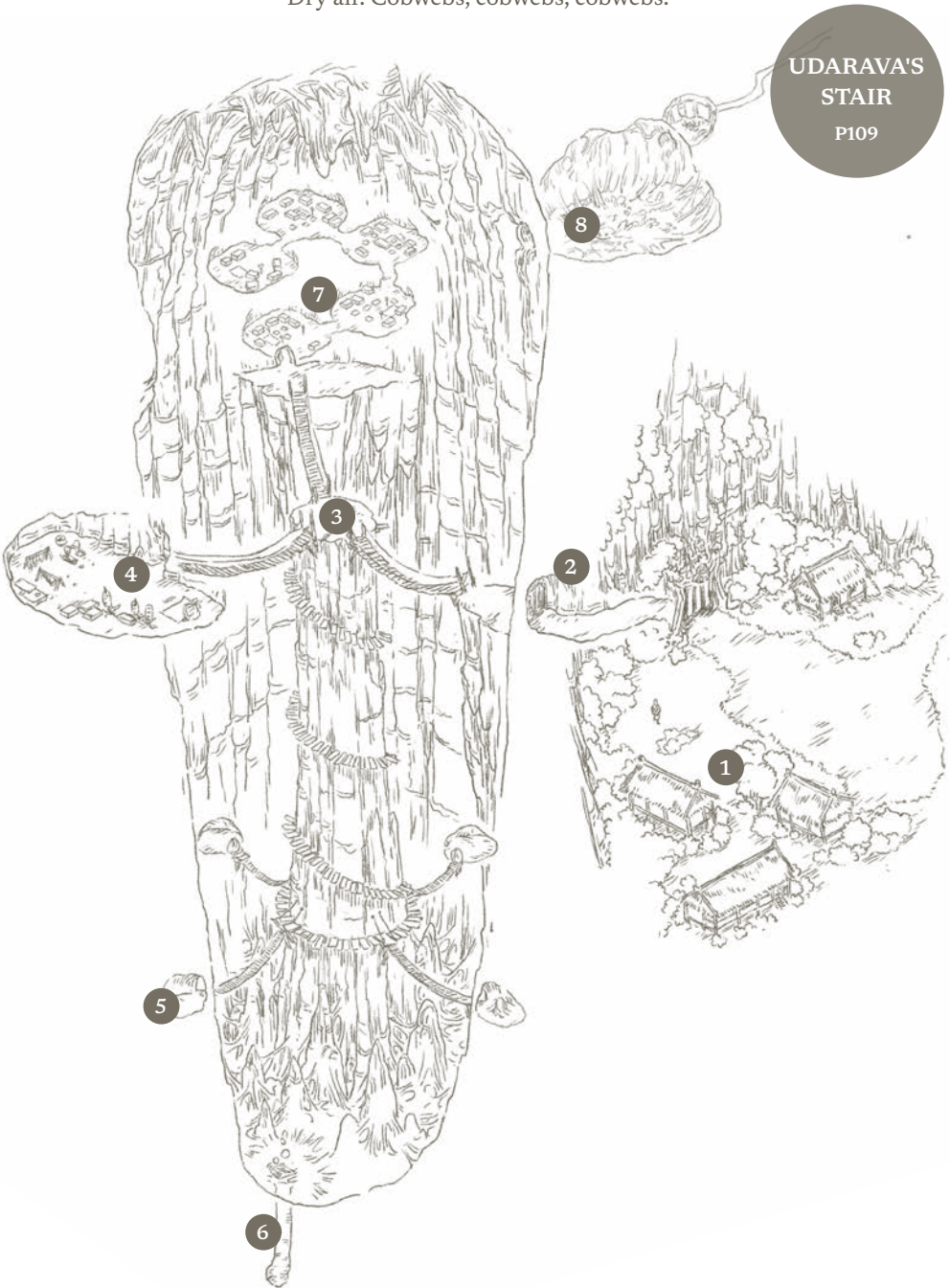


EVEN KNOWN PASSAGES ARE UNLIT.  
Monks encountered underground carry lanterns.

THE ENTRANCES TO UDARAVA'S STAIR ARE SECRET;  
only encounters with the AMBASSADOR SPIDER<sup>{P94}</sup>,  
the WEBBING SPIRIT<sup>{P95}</sup>, or ROACH SCHOOL<sup>{P101}</sup>  
creatures are possible, in such passages.

# PRECINCT OF THE SPIDER

VIGOROUS SPIDER was Udarava's consort, the saint of difficult loves. Her precinct occupies natural rock. Dry air. Cobwebs, cobwebs, cobwebs.





### ① TEACHING PAVILLIONS

Benches, writing boards. Carved with complaints: “So hot today.” “My wrist hurts.”

KUNTI BRAK<sup>[P92]</sup> lies on a bench, stares at SISTER BOULDER<sup>[P100]</sup> far above. Other monks console her.

### ② SPIDER GATE

Curves right to low double doors. The DOOR GUARDIANS<sup>[P64]</sup> kneel. Past the doors: the SPIDER HALL.

### ③ SPIDER HALL

A cliff. A rope bridge to a ROCK COLUMN. From there, two rope bridges. One to the higher cliff, opposite: the SCRIPTURE HALL. The other to a cave in the west wall: the SPINNING WORKSHOP.

Log steps spiral down the column: to the DREAMING CELLS and FALSE STAIR.

In the ceiling, a hole: to the SPIDER SHRINE.

### ④ SPINNING WORKSHOP

Traders bring goods, take home spider-silk yarn. But dust has settled on these SPINNING WHEELS. No new cocoons have come from THREE EYE SPIDER<sup>[P94]</sup>.

### ⑤ DREAMING CELLS

Four total. ONE IS SEALED WITH TOUGH WEBS. It is taboo to break the seal. Inside: DHWE SING<sup>[P93]</sup>. Fall asleep touching her skin, to enter her MIND HALL<sup>[P96]</sup>.

### ⑥ FALSE STAIR

A WEB SEAL: opaque, fizzing with magic. Monks tell you this is UDARAVA'S STAIR into the underworld.

If you break the seal: you find a shallow well, leading nowhere.

### ⑦ SCRIPTURE HALL

Every book on a cushion, in its own cubbyhole. FIVE CHAMBERS, five categories:

☞ GENEALOGIES. Of fallen lowlander houses. Many annotated with rumours of surviving heirs.

☞ BESTIARIES. Notable: a travelogue beyond Udarava's Stair, detailing safe paths and fauna.

☞ POETRY. By Temple monks. In praise of wine, of boys, of sex. They were not always chaste.

☞ ANALECTS. Attributed to Udarava. Sheer volume and variety; you could justify any doctrine.

☞ SPELL SCROLLS. Notable: CLOTH TO FLAME; BLOOD TO MUD; SUMMON RAIN; SWIM THROUGH EARTH.

If you haven't met BRINTI BOW'S DAUGHTER<sup>[P87]</sup> yet, you meet her here. “The manual for COMMAND BIRD is unaccounted for,” she complains.

### ⑧ SPIDER SHRINE

Private nest of THREE EYE SPIDER<sup>[P94]</sup>. In bundles: a SILVER ABACUS; bones of a sunbear; a HARP whose notes no living human ear may hear.

Around a corner: THREE EYE SPIDER'S CORPSE, cracked open like an egg.

Hidden behind a tapestry: a squeeze to the BLACK POOL<sup>[P109]</sup>.



## “KUNTI BRAK” Spider School Master

Extraordinary. Frail. Language arts, ink-craft, knitting.  
Sight-blotting pinch. Belt of talismans.

Persistent cough. Empty stare of a dowager who let her grandchildren die.

Taught theology, writing, rhetoric. LOVED ARGUING OUTRE POSITIONS, to keep her students sharp. “Demons are mutable. Why must Vigorous Spider be a spider—and not, say, Vigorous Roach?”

BRAK REGRETS THESE WORDS. She snaps into focus. “BRING ME TO YOUNG TOPTA<sup>(P104)</sup>! Let me talk to him. I can talk some sense into him!”

---



## “DHWE SING” Dreaming Monk

Ordinary. Hale. Breathing, singing, dreaming.  
Unarmed. Silk cocoon.

Softest sighs. Smells like the idealised version of your preteen crush.

To escape her suitors, Sing chose the Temple’s most difficult practice: AN APPRENTICESHIP WITH THREE EYE SPIDER<sup>[P94]</sup> IN THE ART OF DREAMS.

She has been asleep for the past year, KNITTING IN HER MIND HALL<sup>[P96]</sup>, trying to repair a nightmare. Her eyes flutter, her limbs jerk.

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# THE AMBASSADOR SPIDER

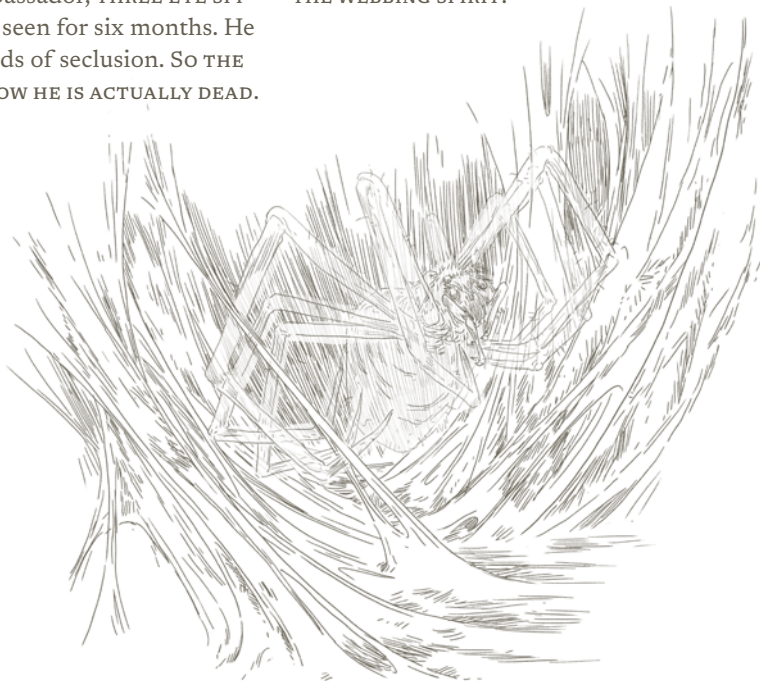
Spiders honour Udarava by sending an ambassador to the daylands. Their duties: to teach the DREAMING ART; to mummify worthy monks; to guard the way to the surface world.

The current ambassador, THREE EYE SPIDER, hasn't been seen for six months. He is prone to periods of seclusion. So THE MONKS DON'T KNOW HE IS ACTUALLY DEAD.

He haunts the Temple in two forms:

- ☞ His will, a GHOSTLY SPIDER.
- ☞ His instincts, the WEBBING SPIRIT.

THREE EYE SPIDER HAS NO CONTROL OVER THE WEBBING SPIRIT.



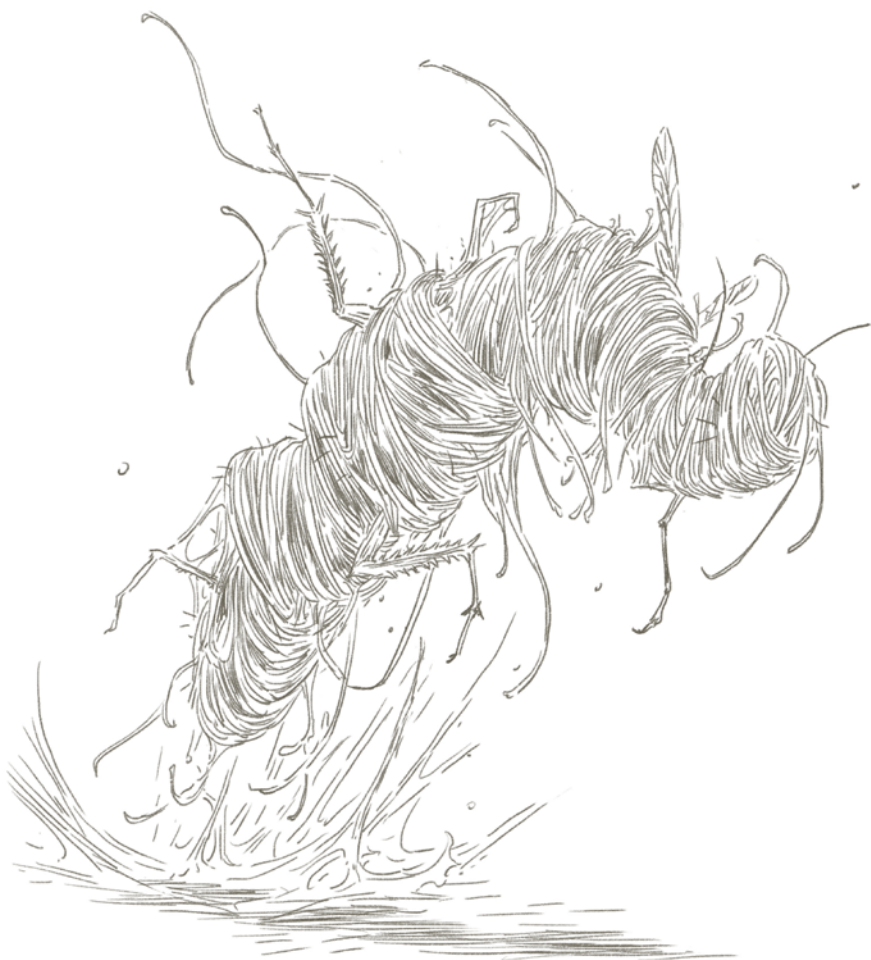
## “THREE EYE SPIDER” Powerless Ego

☞ *Extraordinary. Frail. Stalking, counting, psychic-craft.*  
☞ *Unarmed. Incorporeality.*


The most he can do is touch you. You hear his accent in your head.

Bored with his duties, Three Eye Spider left to tour the astral realms. He lost track of time. WHILE HE WAS GONE HIS BODY STARVED; his subconscious got loose.

His absence has let roaches into the Temple. He ASKS FOR HELP TO STOP THIS INVASION. He asks you. He'd be ashamed if the monks knew this is all his fault.



## “WEBBING SPIRIT” Escaped Id

 *Powerful. Hale. Bouncing, trapping, growing. Flagelliform whip-arms. Acini-form carapace.*

Moves like struggling prey. Mute. Mirrors your actions.

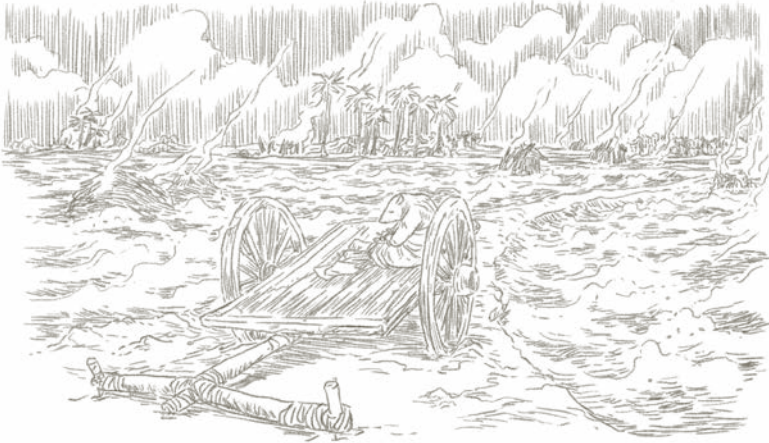
When Three Eye Spider died his Mind Hall stepped out its own front door, and into the world. Personality of a kindergarten. **LEARNS BAD HABITS FASTER THAN GOOD ONES.**

Hungry, opportunistic. **WILL SWALLOW A CREATURE, TAKE ITS SHAPE, DOUBLE IN SIZE.** Instinctively feared by roaches.

---



## THE MIND HALL OF DHWE SING



A bullock CART by a burnt rice field.  
Figures emerge from the dark—naked,  
shivering.


DHWE SING<sup>(P93)</sup> sits on the cart and knits  
shawls. These are people she knew:

parents, aunts, neighbours. She lost her  
village to war.

Down the road: the MIND HALL OF THREE  
EYE SPIDER. Up the road: the MIND HALL  
OF TOPTA SOKRAW.



## LOST RELATIVES

 Ordinary. Frail. Shambling, grabbing, shouting.  
Smouldering hands. Too many.

Will pull at whatever you are wearing. They just want  
to keep warm. You'll need a village's worth of fabric to  
clothe them all.



## THE MIND HALL OF THREE EYE SPIDER

Walls of quivering silk on cricket-leg stilts. Three Eye Spider was a predator; this is a monument to his repressed urges.

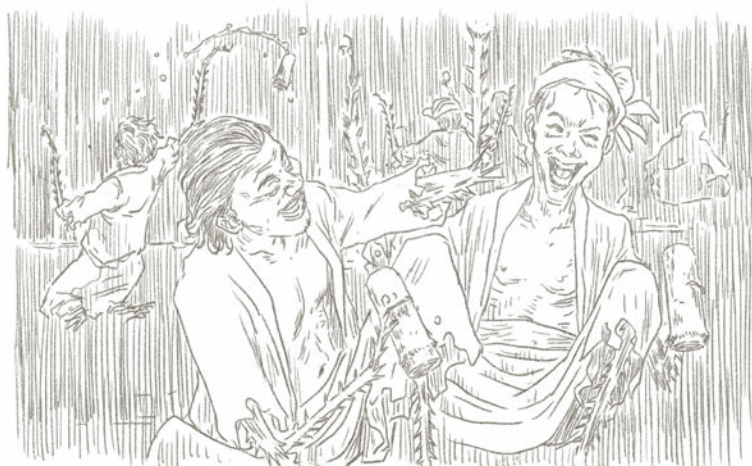
Windows look out onto waking reality—  
THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE WEBBING  
SPIRIT<sup>[P95]</sup>. Stand at a window and PILOT  
THE WEBBING SPIRIT LIKE A MECHA.



## THE MIND HALL OF TOPTA SOKRAW

A dockside inn. A DOZEN REVELLERS:  
ordinary sailors—with roach limbs. In  
a back room: TOPTA SOKRAW<sup>[P104]</sup> makes  
out with a roach-limbed man.

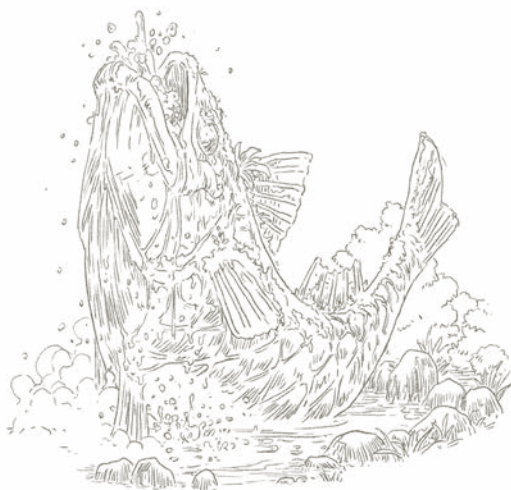
DRIVE THESE REVELLERS AWAY?  
Topta out in the waking world will  
spend the rest of the day sobbing in  
a BREATHING CELL<sup>[P102]</sup>.



# RICE HALL

In a line: storehouses on stilts. A month's supply of rice. Mostly grain; some bags of flour. Mousing cats. A WEEK'S SUPPLY OF LAMP OIL.

Behind the storehouses: foliage hiding CLIFFS.



## ① PERCH SPRING

Wagon-sized figure of EAGER PERCH.  
Wide mouth mystically gushing water.  
Feeds the WHITE FALLS<sup>[P80]</sup>.

## ② GARDENS

Terraces: bean vines and leafy greens;  
chrysanthemums of every colour;  
flowering ginger. The cloth antlers  
of DEER SCHOOL MONKS bobbing  
between rows.

## ③ KITCHEN

Stoves, prep tables out in the open.  
Mealtimes: fresh fruit and bland  
porridge. MONKS RECLINE on the steps.

## ④ BARRICADE

Makeshift. Always manned by at least  
THREE COUCAL SCHOOL MONKS<sup>[P71]</sup>. Clear  
view of the BOULDER GATE<sup>[P102]</sup>. Nobody  
may pass.

## ⑤ GOLD HALLS

Three storehouses, cut into the rock.  
Open doorways. On lintels: "Greed is  
its own punishment".

ONCE INSIDE, YOU CANNOT LEAVE.  
Unless you have a key from BRINTI  
BOW'S DAUGHTER<sup>[P87]</sup>.

☞ GOLDWARE, JADE BEADS, MIRRORS.  
The monks gave up their personal  
effects. In unlocked coffers.

☞ FABRIC. Rags donated by laity.  
Five bolts of spun SPIDER SILK; five  
baskets full of spider-silk yarn.

☞ LAW STONES. From lowlander  
kings. Kings are oathbound to aid  
anybody with a law stone.

## ⑥ RICE PASSAGE

In the cliff face: an extended S-bend  
to the COUCAL LEDGE<sup>[P109]</sup>.

PRECINCT  
OF THE  
BOULDER  
P102



UDARAVA'S  
STAIR  
P109



## “SISTER BOLDER” Temple Founder

☞ Ordinary. Hale. Being, balancing, silence. Unarmed.  
☞ Stone face.

An enormous rock, atop the mountain.

Followers of the god Udarava gathered about Sister Boulder. They aspired to her stoicism, her solidity. They carved the Temple out of the rock, under her.

She used to wear only a GOLD BAND AROUND HER DIAMETER.  
Now TOPTA SOKRAW<sup>(P104)</sup> holds her hostage. She is GRADUALLY  
BEING ENGULFED BY A WRITHING SKIN OF ROACHES.



# THE ROACH SCHOOL

TOPTA SOKRAW<sup>(P104)</sup> was master of the BOULDER SCHOOL. He taught the arts of harmony—of architecture, sculpture, the meridians of the body. He hoped to find harmony in himself.

He'd always felt his devotions rote and his arts hollow. That his monkhood was a sham. Topta begged SISTER BOULDER for guidance.

It was the WIZARD IN WHITE<sup>(P110)</sup> who replied. "Faith is mindless," they hissed, in his ear. "Truth is in your urges. Ease is within reach." Topta listened.

He is master of the Boulder School no longer. He is prophet of the ROACH SCHOOL, now.



## THE ROACH MASTER'S WHIM

What is TOPTA SOKRAW'S PURPOSE, today?  
His ROACH SCHOOL MONKS<sup>(P105)</sup> assist him:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>1 FIXING A STONE GUARDIAN<sup>(P75)</sup>.<br/>A candidate must be baited up the mountain.</p> <hr/> | <p>4 RANTING AT SISTER BOULDER. Topta mocks her, shakes his fist. Shouts till hoarse.</p> <hr/>           |
| <p>2 GRABBING A NEW MONK TO PERSUADE.<br/>This will be a monk you have already met.</p> <hr/>           | <p>5 FINISHING HIS MASTERWORK:<br/>Odoyoq's idol, in the SCULPTING WORKSHOP<sup>(P102)</sup>.</p> <hr/>   |
| <p>3 SENDING ROACH-BEARING COUCALS.<br/>Topta yells from the DAWN PAVILLION<sup>(P103)</sup>.</p> <hr/> | <p>6 SOBBING IN A BREATHING CELL<sup>(P102)</sup>.<br/>The other monks wait, consumed by doubt.</p> <hr/> |

# PRECINCT OF THE BOLDER

SISTER BOULDER was Udarava's first disciple, after his departure. She is the saint of long practice. Her precinct is cut from the mountain's crown.

The Temple's spiral up the mountain ends here at the BOULDER SHRINE.

## ① BOULDER GATE

The DOOR GUARDIANS<sup>(P64)</sup> hide behind their shut door, ashamed. Their ANTLERS WERE TORN OFF by Roach School monks.

## ② LIMESTONE HALL

Scaffold, chisels. DUST tickles your nose. The artisan-monks of the Boulder School used the BONES OF THE MOUNTAIN to make their gods and saints and statues.

## ③ BREATHING CELLS

Six meditation rooms. Roach School monks hoard CONTRABAND, here:

- ☞ SEX MANUALS. Animal illustrations.
- ☞ RICE MOONSHINE. Explodes if jostled.
- ☞ A CRATE OF FIREWORKS. Riotous colours.
- ☞ APHRODISIAC POWDER. Lasts an hour.
- ☞ SOPORIFIC FUNGI. Lasts a half-hour.
- ☞ A BETEL SET. A pair of jewelled cutters.

## ④ SCULPTING WORKSHOP

Sooty forges. Tool racks. Shelf: TWELVE IRON SPIKES, inscribed with spells of sleep: WILL SHUT DOWN ANY GUARDIAN.

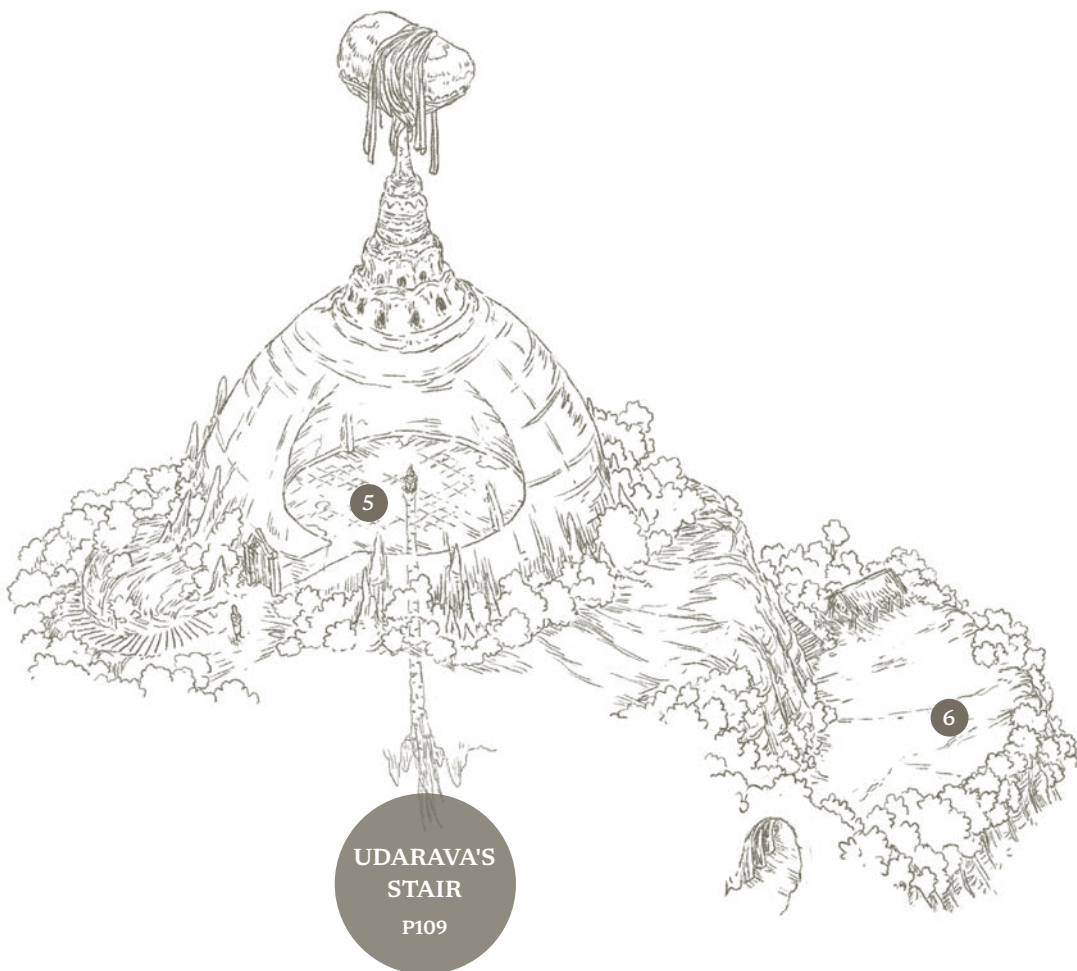
Guardians that come here wait like patients in a dental surgery. TOPTA SOKRAW<sup>(P104)</sup> and his monks make fixes:

- ☞ STONE GUARDIANS become ROACH GUARDIANS<sup>(P106)</sup>;
- ☞ LITTLE GUARDIANS become LITTLE ROACH GUARDIANS<sup>(P106)</sup>.

On a pedestal: a HALF-FINISHED FIGURE OF ODOYOQ. It sports a floating, spinning gloriole made of brass roach legs.







## ⑤ BOULDER SHRINE

**MURALS:** Udarava, kissing a headless woman. In the centre, on a plinth: a **STONE FIGURE OF VIGOROUS SPIDER**, without a head.

On Vigorous Spider's neck, instead: a **LITTLE ROACH GUARDIAN**<sup>[P106]</sup>. If you oppose the Roach School it launches itself at your eyes.

The plinth was a seal. Now dragged aside, revealing a ladder to the **BOULDER CAVE**<sup>[P109]</sup>.

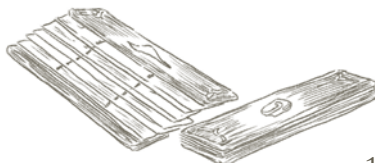
Atop the shrine: **SISTER BOULDER**<sup>[P100]</sup>.

## ⑥ DAWN PAVILLION

A birdhouse. Its **WALLS ARE CARPETED WITH ROACHES**. Terrified cooing from the tame coucals inside.

On a bench, a spell manual:  
**COMMAND BIRD**.

Roach School monks use this spell to send **COUCALS CARRYING ALBINO ROACHES** to lowlander cities. In this way the **WIZARD IN WHITE**<sup>[P110]</sup> spreads themselves.



## “TOPTA SOKRAW”

### Roach School Prophet

☞ *Powerful. Frail. Geomancy, statue arts, massage. Matter-shaping touch. Granite skin, golden amulet, jewelled belt.*

The urgent tenor of a doomsday preacher.  
Head now a mask of swarming roaches.  
Could a doubting monk possibly remain,  
underneath?

ABLE TO MOULD FLESH AND STONE AND BRASS  
AS IF THEY WERE CLAY. He can knot your  
arms together. Poke a pressure-point in  
your skull, so you cannot disobey his word.

Carved the Temple's guardians. Now TOPTA  
WILL RESHAPE THEM ALL IN ODOYOQ'S IMAGE.

---





## ROACH SCHOOL MONKS


*Extraordinary. Hale. Eating, brawling, defacing. Staff. Meditation-hardened skin.*

Their heads bear INDENTS where Topta Sokraw has touched them. Prone to cavorts and laughter. They revel in their newfound FLAUNTING OF RULES.

They've let themselves be changed. This one has roaches in place of their:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>1 EYEBROWS. All appetites are equal, here! They openly REFUSE TOPTA'S INSTRUCTIONS.</p> | <p>4 EARS. Packing for a journey. THEY WANT TO LEAVE. They will spread hot new truths.</p>         |
| <p>2 TATTOOS. Forget Udarava. Forget your gods. ALL MUST PRAISE ODOYOQ ALONE!</p>          | <p>5 RIGHT ARMS. They swing their staff about. Time to SMASH DOORS, SETTLE GRUDGES!</p>            |
| <p>3 GENITALS. Topta has gifted them THE FACE OF MONK FROM A DIFFERENT SCHOOL.</p>         | <p>6 BRAIN. They think of SISTER SING<sup>(P93)</sup>—so asleep, so delectable. THEY SALIVATE.</p> |

# LITTLE ROACH GUARDIANS

 *Ordinary. Hale. Nibbling, watching, fleeing. Sharp edges. Brass skin.*


LITTLE GUARDIANS<sup>[P64]</sup>—radically changed by Topta Sokraw.

They move like you tap your fingernails. They fly on their razor wings. They act as their form dictates, and wish to eat your soft parts.

NOT SUBJECT TO TEMPLE RULES. If damaged, they flee to the SCULPTING WORKSHOP<sup>[P102]</sup>.



# ROACH GUARDIANS

 *Powerful. Hale. Spear-craft, stalking, grappling. Four fists. Stone forearms, stone shins.*

STONE GUARDIANS<sup>[P75]</sup>—radically changed by Topta Sokraw.

They smile. Two heads, two torsos, two legs. They move in insectile stops and starts.

Each is different; this one has:

1 SMUDGED MIRRORS on each forehead. SPELLS FAIL IN THEIR SIGHT.

2 A CREST on each head, shaped like antennae. TARNISHED GOLD.

3 TUSKS like ant mandibles. THEIR SPIT IS A FAST-ACTING ADHESIVE.

4 A RHINO BEETLE MOUNT. Its HORN OXIDISES METALS UPON CONTACT.

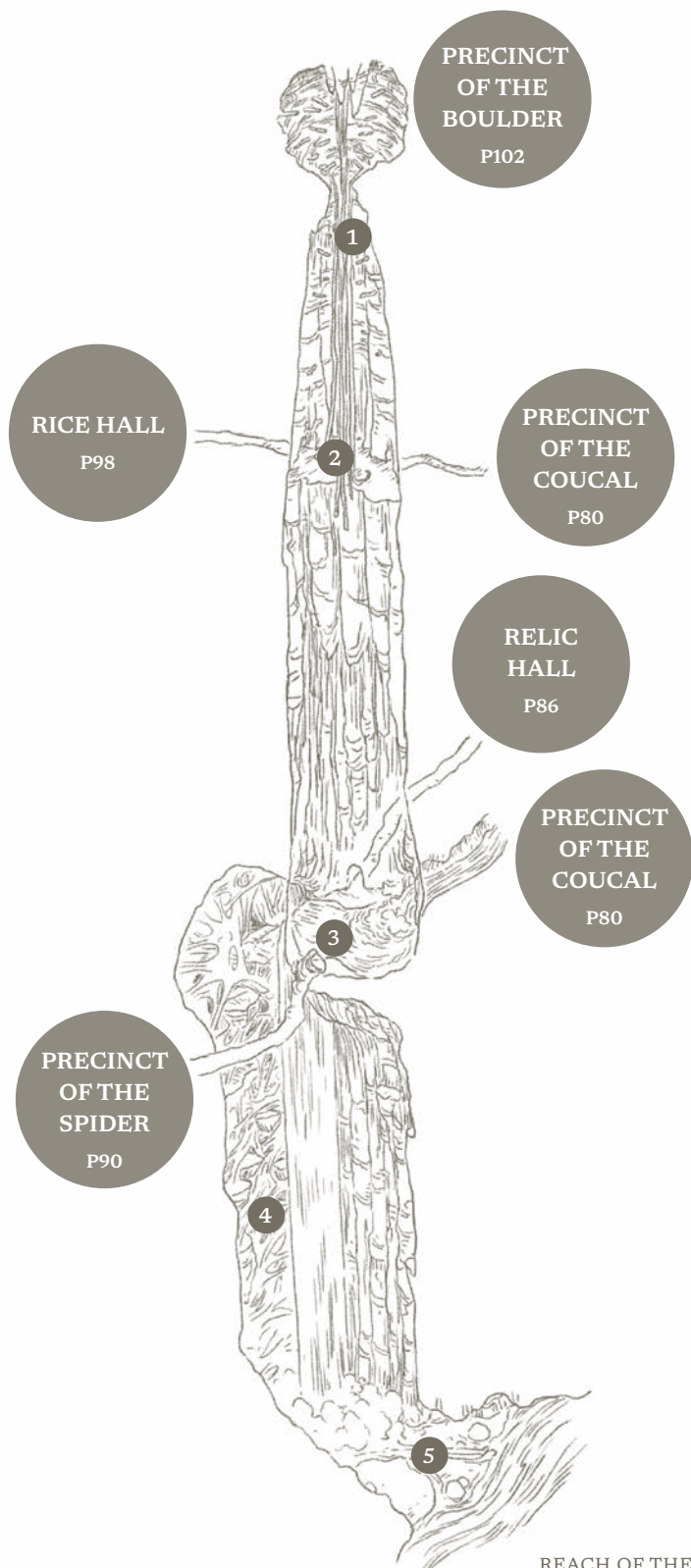
5 WINGS on their backs, like a giant dragonfly. Stone, USELESS.

6 A PEARL on a belt. It GLOWS WITH COLD LUMINESCENCE, like cave fungus.



THEY MOVE ABOUT THE TEMPLE AS STONE GUARDIANS DO.  
To them, those who do not yet serve Odoyoq smell terribly  
sweet. WILL PURSUE ANY NONBELIEVERS THEY SCENT, drag them  
to the PRECINCT OF THE BOULDER<sup>(P102)</sup>.

NOT SUBJECT TO TEMPLE RULES. If damaged, they retreat to the  
SCULPTING WORKSHOP.

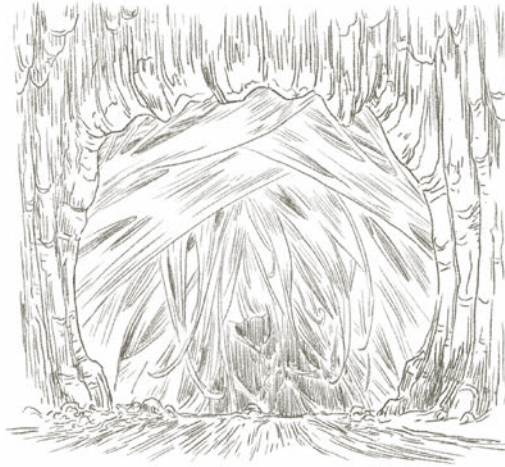




# UDARAVA'S STAIR

Longer than the mountain is tall.  
Flowstone. FIFTEEN STOREYS BETWEEN  
LOCATIONS. Traversal between these  
requires CLIMBING GEAR AND AN HOUR.

ROACHES carpet most surfaces. The  
WIZARD IN WHITE <sup>{PG 110}</sup> hides in plain  
sight. Never the first to attack.



## ① BOULDER CAVE

Ladder up: to the BOULDER SHRINE <sup>{P103}</sup>.

Makeshift path down—bloody robes  
as rope; limbs from dismembered little  
guardians as pitons—to the COUCAL  
LEDGE.

## ② COUCAL LEDGE

A semicircular ledge. North:  
the S-bend to the RICE PASSAGE <sup>{P98}</sup>.  
East: crawlspace into the SWEAT  
BATHS <sup>{P80}</sup> chimney.

## ③ BLACK POOL

Slippery-stone shores. West: squeeze  
to the SPIDER SHRINE <sup>{P91}</sup>. East: slide  
from the RELIC HALL <sup>{P86}</sup>.

Blind luminescent bettas teem in  
water. Strong current from the PERCH  
POOL <sup>{P84}</sup> flowing to the BLACK FALLS.

## ④ BLACK FALLS

Roaring fills the world.

Damp stepped LEDGES behind the  
waterfall. Once blocked by COBWEBS.  
They hang like old curtains, sliced  
open. A ROACH SOLDIER <sup>{P229}</sup>, entangled  
in snare silk, missing parts.

Ledges lead to the BLACK LANDING.

## ⑤ BLACK LANDING

A sense of space. A languid RIVER  
to other depths.

Beached on a shore of smooth  
pebbles: a SKIFF made of chitin.  
Aboard: FIVE ROACH SOLDIERS. Hungry,  
they visit their entangled brother in  
the BLACK FALLS to harvest his limbs.

# ODOYOQ'S AGENT



Spiders are fearful enemies. Direct war is unwise. But spiders are few, and fall lax. ROACH-DOM WILL BURGEON IN SUCH CRACKS.

The WIZARD IN WHITE is a gestalt entity, born of the god Odoyoq's ambition. They've begun to nest in the Temple on Spider Mountain. They will feed on its soft-skins. THEY WILL SLIP INTO THE WORLD OF THE SURFACE. The god Odoyoq will feast.

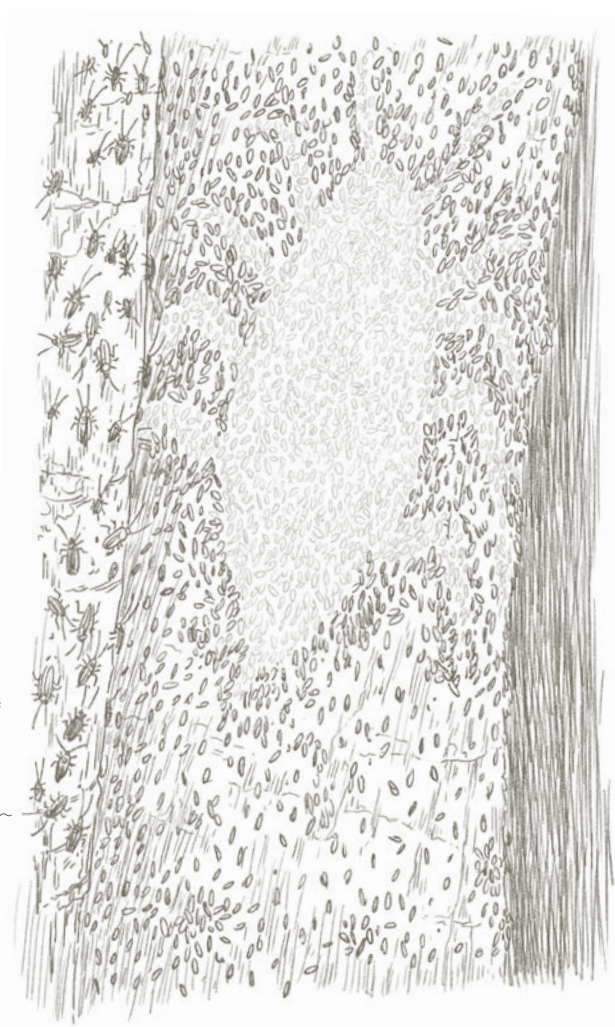
## “WIZARD IN WHITE”

*Powerful. Hale. Sorcery, dream-craft, scattering. Roach swarm. Hundreds, thousands.*

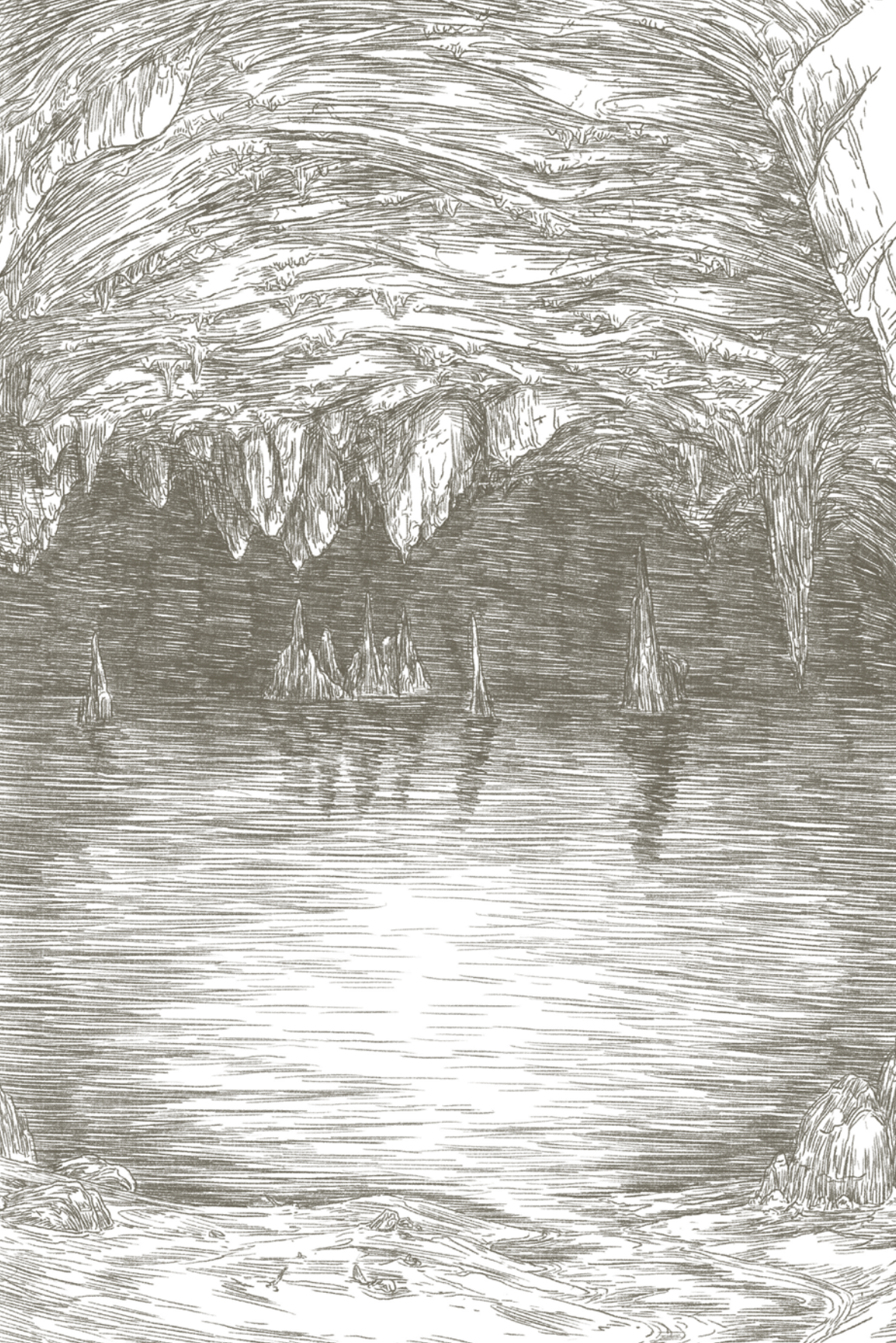
On the wall: the shape of a roach, composed of twice your weight in albino roaches.

THEIR CONSCIOUSNESS FAILS IF ENOUGH ALBINOS DIE. So they prefer hiding, diffused among their red and black brethren. ROACH SOLDIERS<sup>(P229)</sup> obey them.

Hissing voice. LEARNS ANY SPELL WHOSE MANUAL THEY EAT. Currently known spells: BLINDING TOUCH; CLOTH TO GREASE; FLESH TO ROACHES.









CHAPTER 3

# CITY OF PEACE



Necropolis, Metropolis,  
Kleptopolis







# DENDENG, IN SEARCH OF HIS WIFE



Dendeng was very vain. His wife's death made him angry; she dared leave him without warning.

He wanted her back. He would break into the City of Peace. A caretaker of that place tried to stop him at the gate, saying:

"If you steal from death you rob your own soul."

But the caretaker was pale, and scrawny, and spoke softly. So Dendeng paid them no heed.

On the outskirts of the City of Peace he came upon two soldiers. Their spears clashed like hearts beating. Dendeng demanded they stop to show him the way.

The first soldier said: "We desire war. More and more! Give us your shield. Give us your sword."

The second soldier asked: "What is more precious? The strength of your hand?  
Or your wife's touch?"

Dendeng did not like tests. He was mighty, and not in battle only. So he gave the first soldier his sword, and he gave the second soldier his shield.

The soldiers led him to a palace by the River of Hours. At the door there he was greeted by two

maidens. Their hair hung like wisps of mountain mist. Dendeng smiled to seduce them.

The first maiden said: "We desire beauty.  
That which we have lost! Give us your  
hair. Give us your skin."

The second maiden said: "What is more precious?  
The love of others? Or your wife's loyalty?"

Dendeng considered their words. He decided he was through with lustful needs. So he gave the first maiden his hair, and he gave the second maiden his skin.

The maidens announced Dendeng at the Court of Silence. There sat a prince upon a dais. The prince's stillness was like a jade figurine; he did not move. Dendeng understood that the prince was mute.

Dendeng asked himself: What was more precious?  
His loud voice? Or his wife's laughter?

Knowing the answer, Dendeng offered his tongue to the prince. This the prince accepted, and swallowed, and in Dendeng's own voice the prince called out: "Come, beloved."

So Dendeng's wife appeared.

But she did not run to Dendeng's arms. Instead she stepped onto the dais, and sat by the prince's side. For now she was the prince's wife.

"O Dendeng, who was my husband," she said.  
"In life I loved you. Yet you beat me, and went

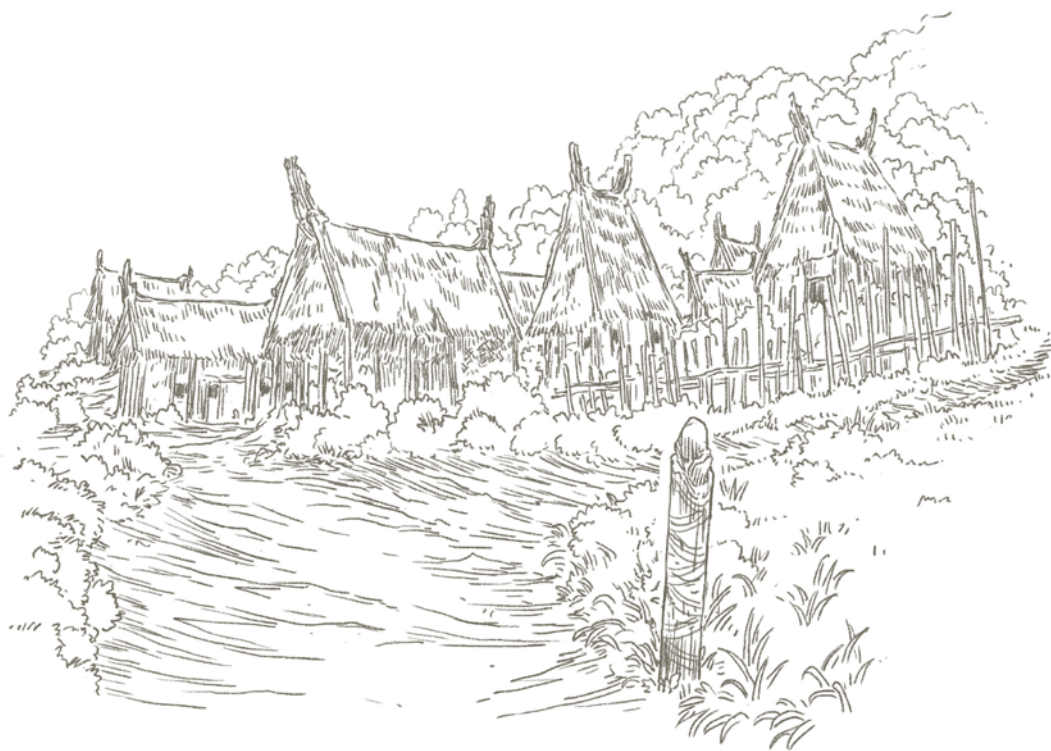
with other women, and treated me as property.  
Your words were as torture to me! So in  
death I will do differently.”

At her command soldiers drove Dendeng  
from the Court of Silence with his own shield,  
his own sword. And Dendeng fled the palace  
and the River of Hours.

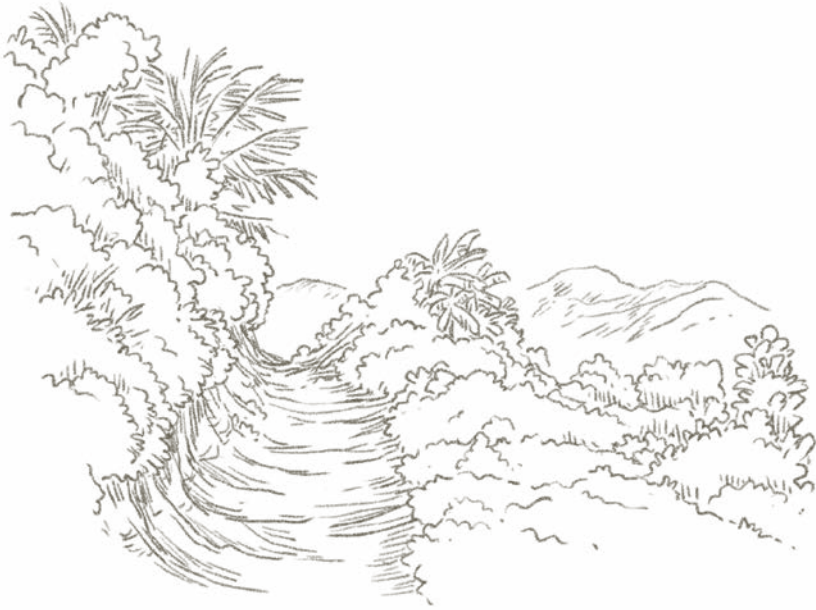
Finally Dendeng stood before the gate of the  
City of Peace. There he was unable to leave.  
He was voiceless, skinless, weak and stumbling—as  
low as the caretakers of that place.

Dendeng was too ashamed to face the living world  
again. None of his vanity remained.





# FOUR DAYS, PAST THE MOUNTAIN PASS



Six jars: wider than you are, glazed the colour  
of rust, harnessed with silk rope to carrying poles.  
Like lords waiting on their porters.

The village chief points you to your jar.  
“Get in place, we’re about to start.”

# SIX FUNERALS



All died in the past year. Last week their remains were sealed in a jar, and their possessions parcelled for travel. Today they move to the CITY OF PEACE.



Whose FUNERAL are you here for?

1 SHIMAN DAS. Your father. He left when you were a child. WHAT QUESTION MUST YOU ASK HIM? He will answer, one way or another.

4 BEKE, infant son of NAKA BOS. A strong woman, shaken. She stares into space. SHE SAVED YOU, ONCE. Now you worry for her.

2 ARISA NUKIM. An old flame. The break-up was bitter. Who cheated? WHY DID SHE SEND NEWS SHE WAS DYING? Why did you come?

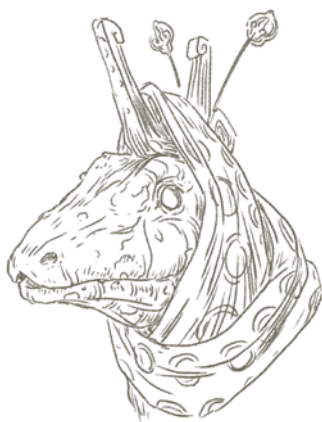
5 ICHE NUKIM. Your rival. In what field? They issued one last challenge—but you arrived too late. HOW WILL YOU BE SATISFIED, NOW?

3 KUKO MANANG. Your teacher. What arts did they impart? WHAT HEIRLOOM DID THEY WITHHOLD FROM you, that they now take to the grave?

6 ALATAS SAN BONG. A scholar. Wishing access to the LIBRARY OF EARS<sup>(P280)</sup> he has killed himself. WHAT IS HE PAYING you, to guard his body?







# YA DAS, VILLAGE IN MOURNING



Funeral parades into the CITY OF PEACE are annual—even if you aren't burying a relative this year you probably have somebody you want to visit.

On parade, the village of Ya Das brings: grave goods;  
ENOUGH FOOD TO FEED THE WHOLE COMMUNITY  
FOR THREE DAYS' TRAVEL, if it matters;  
and NO TORCHES.



## “NANUN DAS” Wealthy Chief

*Ordinary. Frail. Hagglng, dancing, wine-craft.  
Unarmed. Unprotected.*

Skin mottled like a battlefield. They have been chief all their life.

THEY BURY A SIBLING this year. Shiman was always their baby brother. Anybody who impugns his memory is Nanun’s enemy.

They bring THIRTY POTS OF WINE with them. Payment for the new DAS FAMILY TOMBHOUSE<sup>[P148]</sup>. They will discover it is not yet complete.

## “GIGI WOKO” Champion Fighter

*Ordinary. Hale. Spear arts, drinking,  
cosmetic arts. Glowing spear. Charmed sash.*

Cocked eyebrows. Ashamed of her high-pitched voice.

Parade security. Her SPEAR ERASES GHOST-FLESH AT A TOUCH. She will not destroy ghosts outright; maiming them is sacrilege enough.

SHE BURIES A WIFE THIS YEAR. Will Arisa remember her, in the afterlife? Or take a new lover? The thought drives Gigi crazy.





## “KIKLING LOS” Shady Merchant

☞ *Ordinary. Frail. Packing, lying, cooking. Dagger.*  
 ☞ *Unprotected.*

Slurs like a pothead, so he seems harmless.

Past the city of the dead lie the lands of the pale-folk—a  
 people hungry for surface-world goods. Kikling’s snail  
 hauls BASKETWARE AND FISH OIL.

Will travel on to the MARKET OF HOURS<sup>[P159]</sup>, then rendezvous  
 with FALAKUN<sup>[P163]</sup>. Secretly a fence for grave robbers.  
 Wants bodyguards.



## “MANYA” Fretful Caretaker

🐾 Ordinary. Hale. Ritual-craft, tracking, climbing. Claws.  
🐾 Fingerbone charm.

Fur like a storm cloud. Voice low like discouraging thunder.

Waits at ONE STEP CAVE<sup>[P144]</sup>. Manya has been assigned to guide Ya Das to and back from their TOMB-WARD<sup>[P148]</sup>. Continually mutters her worries.

“Things are very bad. Greed and corruption, ghosts running wild. Robbers everywhere.” She looks about, nervous.

“We could get attacked.”

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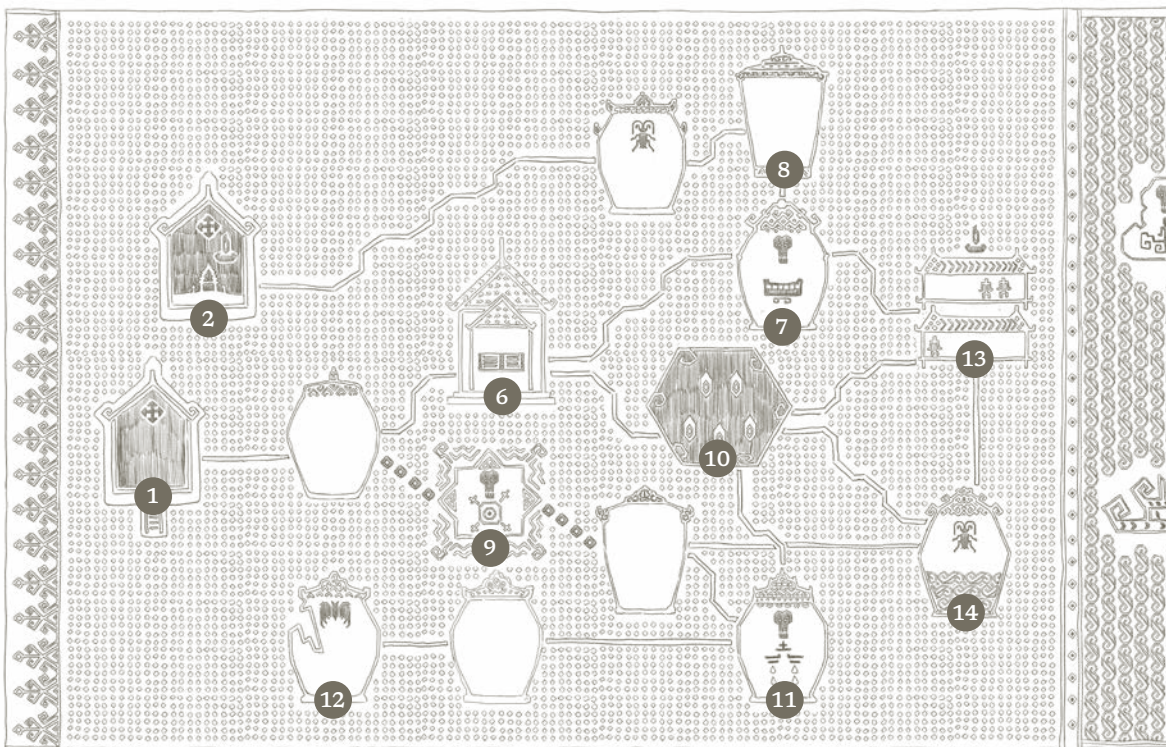


# THE CITY OF PEACE

Dead valley-folk move here, into a ward named after their village. There they are subject to long feasts; stately dances; tedious morality plays—busywork designed to BORE THEM INTO LETTING GO.

This MAP<sup>[P145]</sup> is concerned with how caverns connect. Actual geography in the City may be irrational, impossible; it is not a natural space.

Ya Das's funeral parade enters via ONE STEP CAVE<sup>[P144]</sup>, treks to the ward of YA DAS<sup>[P148]</sup>, performs rites, then leaves the way it came.



## ENTRANCES ↯

- ① One Step Cave<sup>[P144]</sup>
- ② Dome Of Dusk<sup>[P144]</sup>
- ③ Fool Step Cave<sup>[P166]</sup>
- ④ Cold Curtain Cave<sup>[P166]</sup>
- ⑤ Quiet Roost Cave<sup>[P166]</sup>

## WESTERN WARDS OF NOTE<sup>[P142]</sup>

- ⑥ Court Of Silence<sup>[P145]</sup>
- ⑦ Ya Manang<sup>[P148]</sup>
- ⑧ Ya Das<sup>[P148]</sup>
- ⑨ Screaming Tomb<sup>[P145]</sup>
- ⑩ Mother Veil<sup>[P146]</sup>
- ⑪ Ya Bos<sup>[P148]</sup>
- ⑫ Ille Ranang<sup>[P144]</sup>





## ROADS <sup>(P129)</sup>

Their routes are set, but their details are RANDOMLY GENERATED.

## WARDS <sup>(P130)</sup>

Normal wards are RANDOMLY GENERATED; notable locations are listed below.

## TROUBLES



Bat-folk  
(P153)



Caretakers  
(P137)



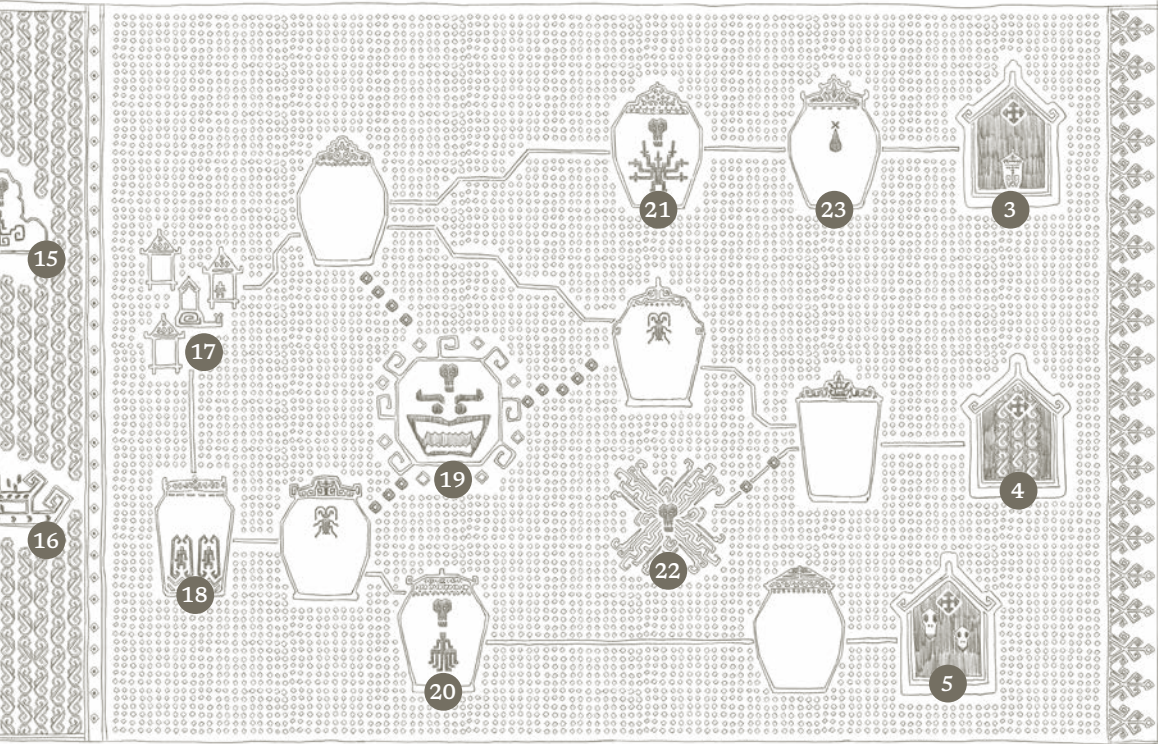
Roaches  
(P174)



Hungry Ghosts  
(P169)



Tomb Robbers  
(P162)



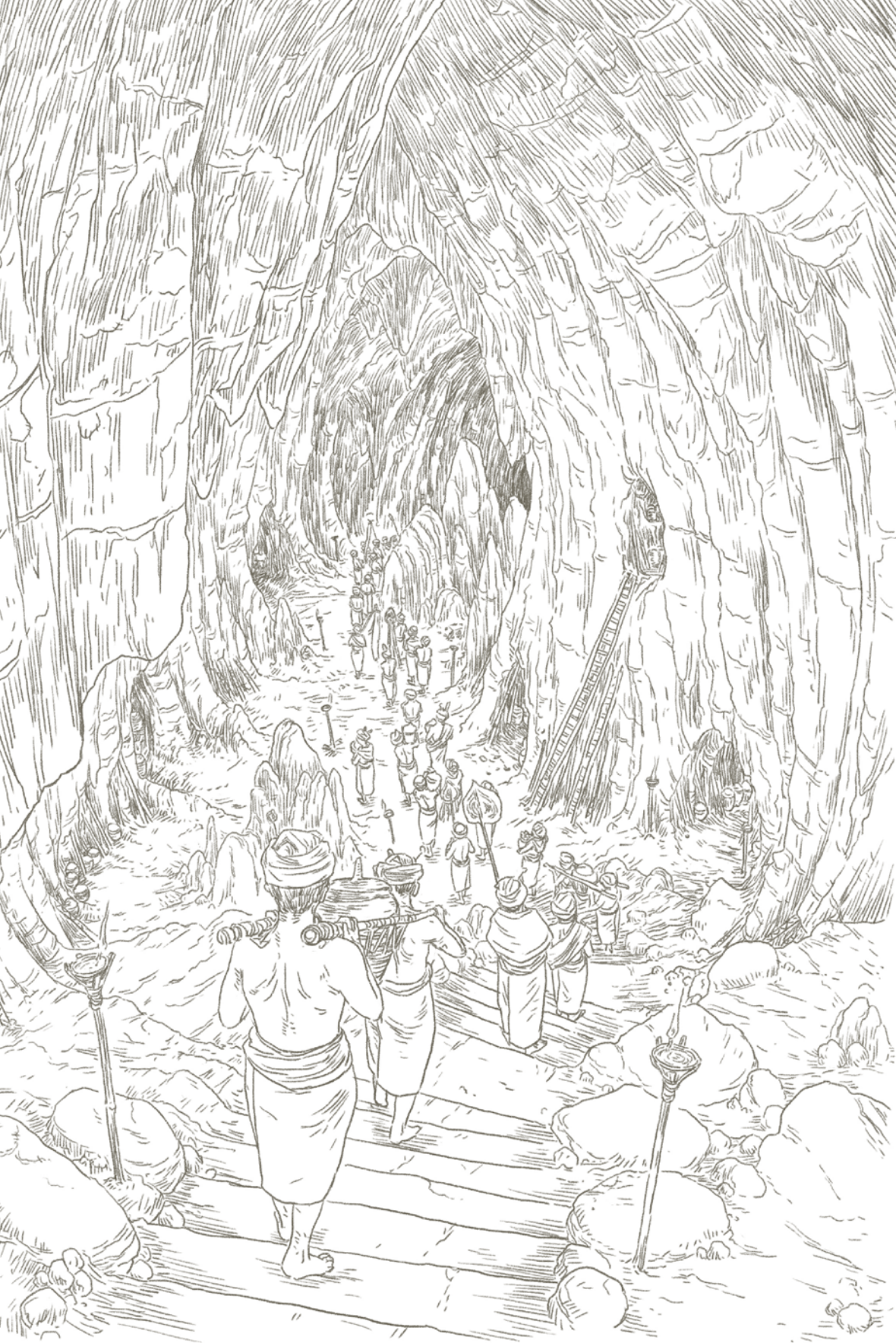
## RIVER OF HQJRS <sup>(P157)</sup>

- ⑬ Caretaker Village <sup>(P158)</sup>
- ⑭ Field Awaiting Flood <sup>(P158)</sup>
- ⑮ The Drifting Daughter <sup>(P161)</sup>
- ⑯ Leech Temple Barge <sup>(P160)</sup>
- ⑰ Market Of Hours <sup>(P159)</sup>
- ⑱ Bu-Ni-Ang-Ka <sup>(P159)</sup>

## EASTERN WARDS OF NOTE <sup>(P164)</sup>

- ⑲ Spurned Prince's Palace <sup>(P170)</sup>
- ⑳ Ille Tun Das <sup>(P166)</sup>
- ㉑ Ya Wang <sup>(P166)</sup>
- ㉒ Tomb Of Beauty <sup>(P167)</sup>
- ㉓ Ille Nayam <sup>(P167)</sup>





## ROADS IN THE CITY OF PEACE

Walking a road is a THREE-HOUR JOURNEY, WITH LIGHT.  
Many lamps, on waist-high posts; these burn a HEATLESS,  
SPECTRAL WHITE FLAME. The air is cold.

This road is:

1 Carpeted by SHELL. Crunching like rice crackers.

1 A STRAIGHT SHAFT UP. A rope-crane lift; fits three.

2 Stepped by RIMSTONE POOLS full of cave pearls.

2 A DOWNWARD SLOPE. No clear view of the bottom.

3 Curtained by HANGING FILAMENTS. Poison dew.

3 A LOW AVENUE. Your head scrapes the ceiling.

4 Riddled with MICE-SIZED HOLES. Shiny with slime.

4 A WIDE SHELF. Along a chasm of unknown depth.

5 Forested in STALAGMITES. A path has been cut.

5 A NARROW TRAIL. You move through in a single file.

6 Stacked with BURIAL JARS. Broken and forgotten.

6 A pair of ledges, a RICKETY BRIDGE. Rapids below.

1 Claustrophobically still. YOUR HEARTBEAT pounds in your ears.

2 Always listening. Loud ECHOES REPEAT ANY WHISPERED WORDS.

3 Constantly flickering. A WIND puts out any non-magical light.

4 Fuzzy to the touch. MOULD. Quickly colonising skin and cloth.

5 Eye-wateringly perfumed. Joss STICKS stuck in every crevice.

6 Alive, writhing. A SNAKE COLONY. Blind, they bite at movement.

## WARDS IN THE CITY OF PEACE

Passing through a ward takes minutes. FULLY EXPLORING ONE MIGHT TAKE THREE HOURS. Few lamps; the residents here don't need them.  
Air as warm as breath.

### What community inters their dead here?

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 A forest village. Poor. HALF THE JARS HERE BELONG TO DOGS. Sacrilege triggers loud barking. | 4 A river port. Showy. EVERY BODY IN THEIR OWN FULL-SIZED BOAT. Sound of languid sloshing. |
| 2 A farming village. Modest. A POOL OF RICE WINE, STILL AS A MIRROR. A gulp makes you drunk.  | 5 A prince's fort. Gilded. MANY WEAPONS. One of them is alive, very annoyed, very lonely.  |
| 3 A mining town. Meagre. BRONZE INSTEAD OF PORCELAIN COVERS ON THE JARS, broad as shields.    | 6 A devastated village. Cheap. Was it illness? A feud? PACKED WITH JARS; not enough room.  |

A person's burial jar is surrounded by their possessions—  
finest clothes; favourite tools; preferred liquors and sauces.

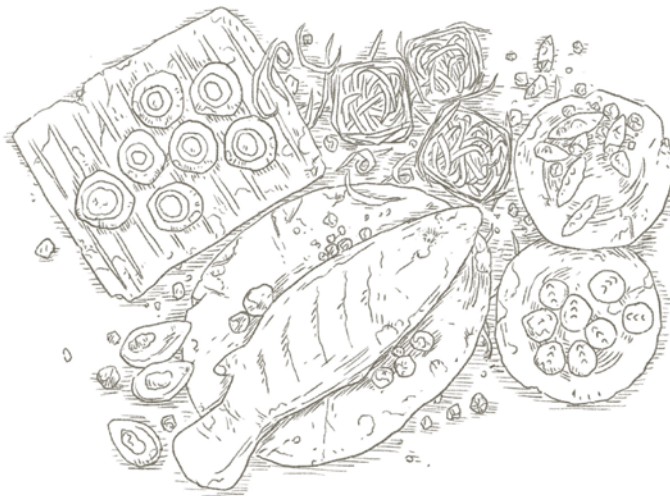
### Most jars here are:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 ON STILTS. These caverns feed into the river; blind things teem in the knee-high current. | 4 IN INDIVIDUAL TOMBHOUSES. Cut into the living rock. Stacked like flats, ladder-accessible. |
| 2 IN ROWS, in passageways. Narrow, as easy to get lost in as a megalopolis's back alleys.   | 5 RITUALLY SMASHED. The ground is crockery. Every foetal body on their own stone table.      |
| 3 AT TUNNEL ENDS. An ancient mine, repurposed. Passing torches catch the glint of tin ore.  | 6 HALF BURIED. A columned gallery filled with fine sediment, like dunes drowning a forest.   |

Resident GHOSTS<sup>(P155)</sup> are usually unseen, speak in one-word whispers, and participate in rites like sleepwalkers going through the motions.

Not yet cleared away:

- 1 A SCREEN OF WHITE SILK, bisecting the broadest chamber.  
On it, VEILING SPIRITS<sup>(P147)</sup> silently repeat scenes from famous epics, like looped gifs.
- 2 SERVING PLATTERS piled high. PAINTED CAKES, STRAW SALADS, CLAY FIRED TO LOOK LIKE BAKED FISH. Chewed by the dead, these crumble to sand.
- 3 Festive ribbons. Even without music, the DANCE continues.  
DRESSES WORN BY INVISIBLE GHOSTS CURTSY, and whirl, and crisscross each other.
- 4 Urns and ladles. WATER BOILED WITH BLACK JASMINE AND DEEP GINGER. Used to wash burial jars, the MIXTURE REPELS GHOSTS hungry or needy.
- 5 Brass bowls, filled with ash. INCENSE FUMES LINGER IN CLUMPS ON THE FLOOR, SHAPED LIKE PEOPLE—ghosts, asleep. Fan the smoke to wake them.
- 6 DUST, ON EVERYTHING. The caretakers are shorthanded, but the neglect here feels obscene. Empty lamps, rotting beams, RISK OF CAVE-INS.





# ENCOUNTERS IN THE CITY OF PEACE

Dead, the City lives. There is always something.  
When TRAVELLING A ROAD<sup>{P129}</sup> or EXPLORING A WARD<sup>{P130}</sup>, roll:

1 TWO CARETAKERS <sup>{P134}</sup> , carrying too many cakes, incense sticks	1 Flying from	1 A pack of SNUFFING SPIRITS <sup>{P133}</sup> . Whistling. A dozen lights go out, at a time.
2 A band of ROBBERS <sup>{P163}</sup> — ✕ four blame the fifth for ☞ getting them lost	2 Chasing after	2 BAT-FOLK COLONISTS <sup>{P154}</sup> : 🦇 a mother, a father, two children. Sightseeing.
3 The sound of feet slapping stone, whenever you stop to listen	3 Worrying	3 A pair of JAR PERSONS <sup>{P151}</sup> , freshly awake, eager to venture beyond the City.
4 A pale-folk warrior, Ushu the Shaggy, hunting a ROACH INFILTRATOR <sup>{P175}</sup>	4 Assuaging	4 A HUNGRY GHOST <sup>{P169}</sup> —the 💀 one whose haunting ground is closest.
5 A FUNERAL PARADE, with tagalong merchants and cargo snails	5 Shooing away	5 A mineral scent; you are made to recall your mother's face powders.
6 FOUR CARETAKERS <sup>{P134}</sup> , ☞ stolen grace goods spilling from their arms	6 Losing to	6 A NEEDY GHOST <sup>{P155}</sup> from a ☞ nearby ward—their agony has grown too great.

If the results of your roll totals six, twelve, or eighteen: a living person present  
in the encounter is a ROACH INFILTRATOR, hiding in plain sight.

The City is under threat. ENCOUNTERS WITH THE FOLLOWING TROUBLES  
SIGNAL THEIR WORSENING EFFECTS:

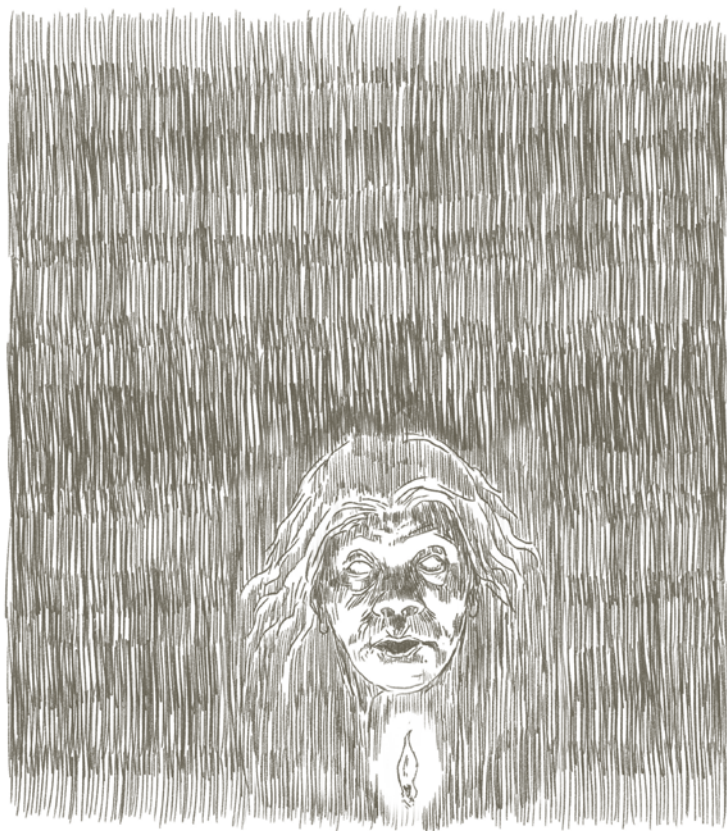
 Bat-folk {P153}	 Caretakers {P137}	 Roaches {P174}	 Hungry Ghosts {P169}	 Tomb Robbers {P162}
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## GETTING LOST IN THE CITY OF PEACE

You do not belong here. If you lose  
all sources of light the dark smothers  
time and space. You hear the COUNTING  
SPIRIT<sup>{P138}</sup> CROW; A DAY HAS PASSED.

ROLL A NEW ENCOUNTER. When you  
see their lights you realise you are  
somewhere else—in the belly of  
MOTHER VEIL<sup>{P146}</sup>.



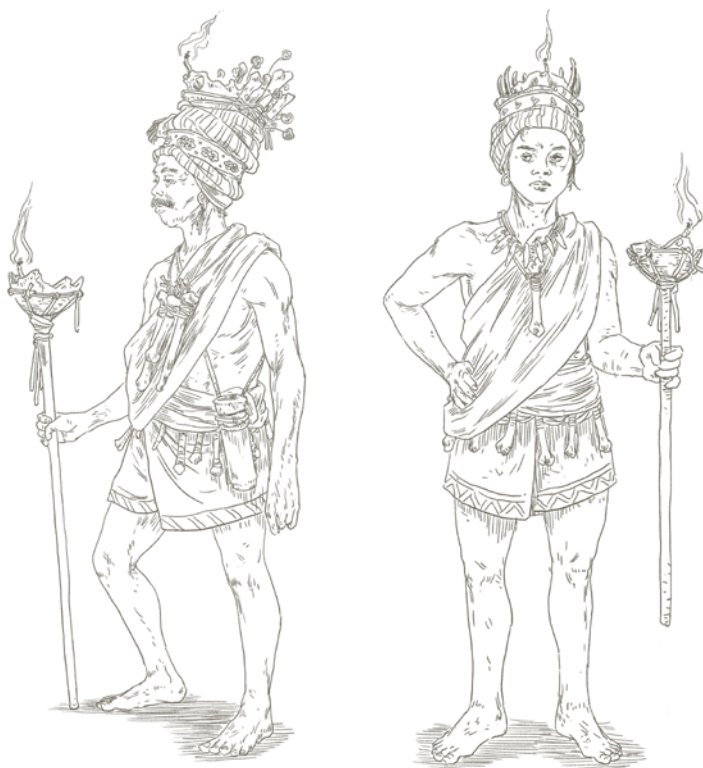
### SNUFFING SPIRITS

☞ *Ordinary. Frail. Extinguishing, whistling, kissing. Bite.  
Unprotected.*

A face, glimpsed when blowing out a lamp.

Born of a desire to lose, to conceal. PUTS OUT FIRES with a puff.  
Will trail the living at a distance like cowardly mutts.

WHEN VISIBLE A SNUFFING SPIRIT MAY BE GRABBED, wounded,  
caged—a head of flesh and blood. They cannot speak.



## CARETAKERS

♂ Ordinary. Frail. Memorising, listening, bone-craft.  
 ♀ Lamp-stick. Tibia charm.

The underworld's minders are alive, but may NEVER LEAVE.

Bone ornaments. SKULL-BOWL LAMPS on their heads.  
 Traditionally this lamp burns a unearthly, cold flame.  
 Nowadays it burns orange, from fish oil.

At least one KINDLING SPIRIT<sup>(P140)</sup>, as a pet. Usually tailed  
 by a SNUFFING SPIRIT<sup>(P133)</sup>.

What duty must they perform, this week?

- 1 PREPARE A BANQUET. They are skilled in FOOD PRESENTATION. Meals made for ghosts look lavish, but need not be fit to eat.
- 2 CARVE A NEW TOMBHOUSE. They are skilled in MINING. Followed by a half-dozen HEAVING SPIRITS<sup>(P140)</sup>, as obedient as ducklings.
- 3 PERFORM FOR A DANCE. They are skilled in PERCUSSION. Their drums are made of human leather, and older than they are.
- 4 STAGE A SHADOW PLAY. They are skilled in SINGING. No puppets. Their basket is full of palpable dark: tame VEILING SPIRITS<sup>(P147)</sup>.
- 5 CLEAN A TOMB CAVERN. They are skilled in CERAMIC ARTS. They repair burial jars with colourful, powerfully-adhesive gums.
- 6 TRACK MISSING JEWELLERY. They are skilled in TRAP-CRAFT. The ghosts complain about ROBBERS<sup>(P163)</sup>, armed with many candles.

This one:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1 SHPEAKS WITH A LISHP. They have losht their teeth, shee?   | 4 IS BLIND. A mute CHILD GHOST LEADS THEM by the hand.        |
| 2 SWEATS like a cavern wall. BODY ODOUR like a pickle stall. | 5 TREMORS badly. Their JEWELLERY CLATTERS like mahjong tiles. |
| 3 IS FURRED WITH CAVE MOULD. Shedding spores non-stop.       | 6 HAS A GHOST ARM. It glows. Cannot lift or carry weight.     |

Why did they forsake life aboveground?

1 **HEARTSICKNESS.** Would not let go of a loved one. When his ghost faded, did they die inside?

---

2 **CONDEMNED.** Caretaking is their sentence. What sin did they commit? Are they sorry?

---

3 **GIVEN AWAY.** As a child. What debt did their mother owe the City? Do they resent her?

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4 **LOST.** They aren't even valley-folk. The City took them in. Are they trying to get home?

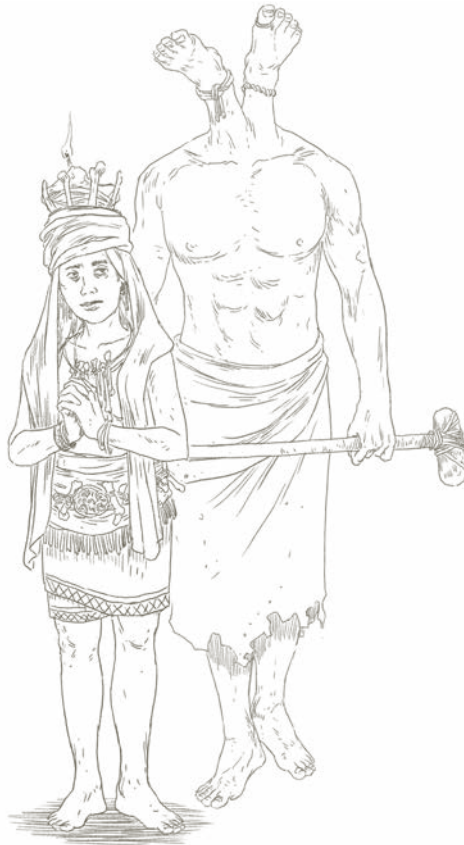
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5 **DUTIFUL.** There are never enough caretakers. So they volunteered. Do they regret this?

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6 **DRIVEN.** A city of ghosts is still a city. Who do they know? What deals have they struck?

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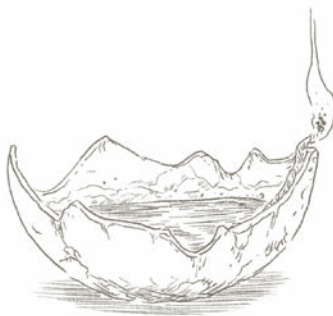
# CARETAKER NEGLIGENCE






Holy law dictates that a caretaker's skull-bowl lamp be filled by tears from the **HOBBLED SON**<sup>(P150)</sup>.




But dealing with hungry ghosts is risky—and **SRI PAPA** argues that holy law need not be difficult. Easier for skull-bowl lamps to be filled with **FISH OIL**, supplied from the surface.





Fish oil burns bright but **FLICKERS CONSTANTLY**. A reminder that expediency is okay; duty may be ignored, comfort should be sought.



When you roll an encounter with **NEGLIGENT CARETAKERS** ,  
their venality **WORSENS OTHER TROUBLES**.

**AFTER ONE ENCOUNTER WITH NEGLIGENT CARETAKERS** ~~~~~   
Replace your next encounter with: **SRI PAPA**, showing **BAT COLONISTS**<sup>(P154)</sup> around. Selling them a still-occupied tombhouse. “We’ll get rid of the ghosts for you, don’t worry.” 

**AFTER TWO ENCOUNTERS WITH NEGLIGENT CARETAKERS** ~~~~~    
Replace your next encounter with: **SRI PAPA**, meeting with **MIKAT OF THE LEECH TEMPLE**<sup>(P160)</sup>. Selling corpse-oil harvesting rights. “Not like ghosts need their rotting bodies.” 

**AFTER THREE ENCOUNTERS WITH NEGLIGENT CARETAKERS** ~~~~~     
Replace your next encounter with: **SRI PAPA**, eyes going grey, jewelled rings slipping from fingers going arthritic, choked by the **DRIFTING DAUGHTER'S GASEOUS SKIRT**<sup>(P161)</sup>. 





## “SRI PAPA” Corrupt Caretaker

☞ *Ordinary. Hale. Managing, profiteering, scrimshaw arts. Magic dagger. Charmed femur crown, charmed ulna belt.*

Holds eye contact past the point it becomes uncomfortable.

Sri Papa was elected chief caretaker two years ago. Retinue: SIX CARETAKER BODY-GUARDS<sup>[P134]</sup> and SIX HEAVING SPIRITS<sup>[P140]</sup>.

Treats the City as his personal treasury. Trades it away for teak, furniture, and art—things he needs to FINISH HIS PALACE IN THE DOME OF DUSK<sup>[P144]</sup>.

---

## “GEGERU” Counting Spirit

☞ *Ordinary. Frail. Arithmetic, timekeeping, crowing. Spurs. Partial incorporeality.*

Blind; cocks his head at the slightest sound.

Instinctively knows the count and location of all material goods within City limits. CANNOT LIE. Serves whoever the caretakers elect as chief.


Born of a desire to correct others. Gegeru always CROWS AT THE START OF A NEW DAY—a call heard across the City, regardless of distance.

---





## “NIWANG” Rigid Caretaker

 *Ordinary. Frail. Teaching, voice-craft, fishing. Unarmed.  
Bib of charmed ribs.*

Fist-pounds their knee to punctuate a point.

Basically a bitter grandparent. BELIEVES CARETAKERS SHOULD LIVE ONLY FOR DUTY. Niwang was chief caretaker, before they lost an election to SRI PAPA.

Never leaves the CARETAKER VILLAGE<sup>[P158]</sup>, except when they swim the RIVER OF HOURS, begging the DRIFTING DAUGHTER<sup>[P161]</sup> to enact justice.

## KINDLING SPIRITS

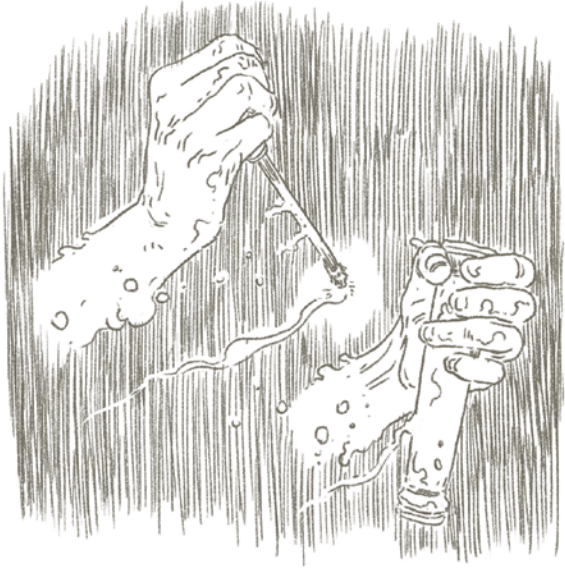
*Ordinary. Frail. Fire-starting,  
unfastening, caressing.  
Unarmed. Unprotected.*

A pair of hands, holding  
a fire piston.

Born of a desire to find, to expose.  
They light the City's lamps. They  
BOND TO CARETAKERS<sup>(P134)</sup> like  
besotted puppies.

Deft with their fingers. One hand  
must hold the fire-piston; the  
other the cylinder. IF MADE TO LET  
GO OF EITHER THE KINDLING SPIRIT  
TURNS TO ASH.

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## HEAVING SPIRITS

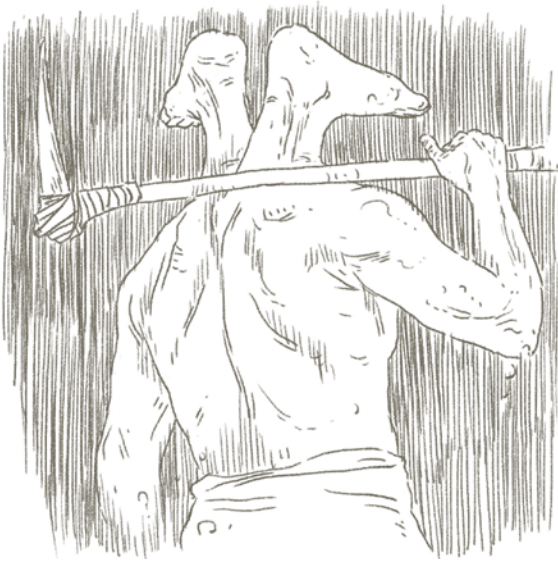
*Ordinary. Hale. Labouring,  
obeying, restraining. Picks.  
Unprotected.*

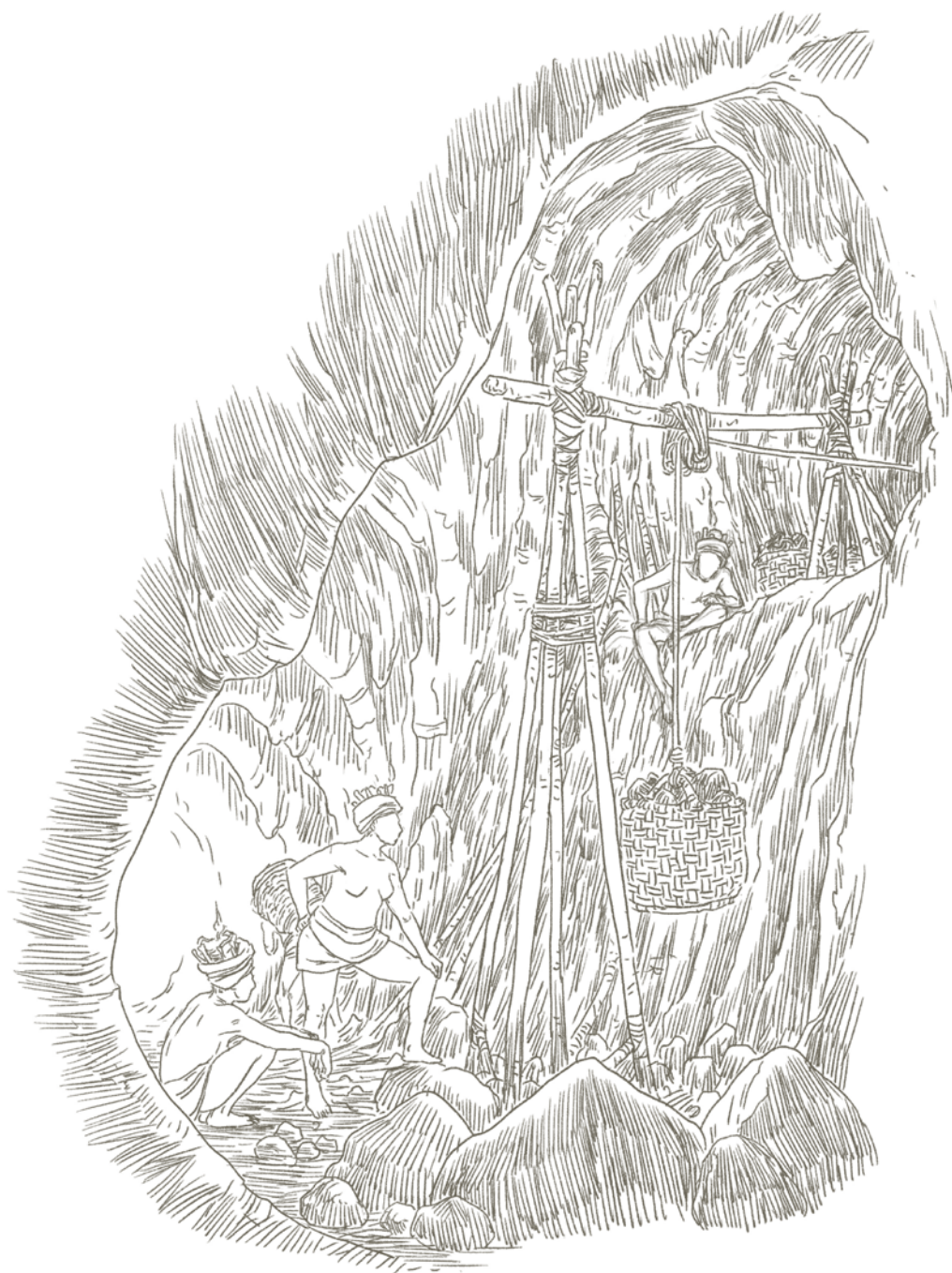
Muscular bodies with feet where  
heads should be.

Born of a desire to be free from  
responsibility. CARETAKERS<sup>(P134)</sup>  
TREAT THEM AS TOOLS, mainly  
used for manual labour: clearing  
tunnels; hauling goods.

Point at them, speak an order—the  
heaving spirit will carry it out.  
SINGLE ORDERS ONLY. Bad at tasks  
requiring discretion or dexterity.

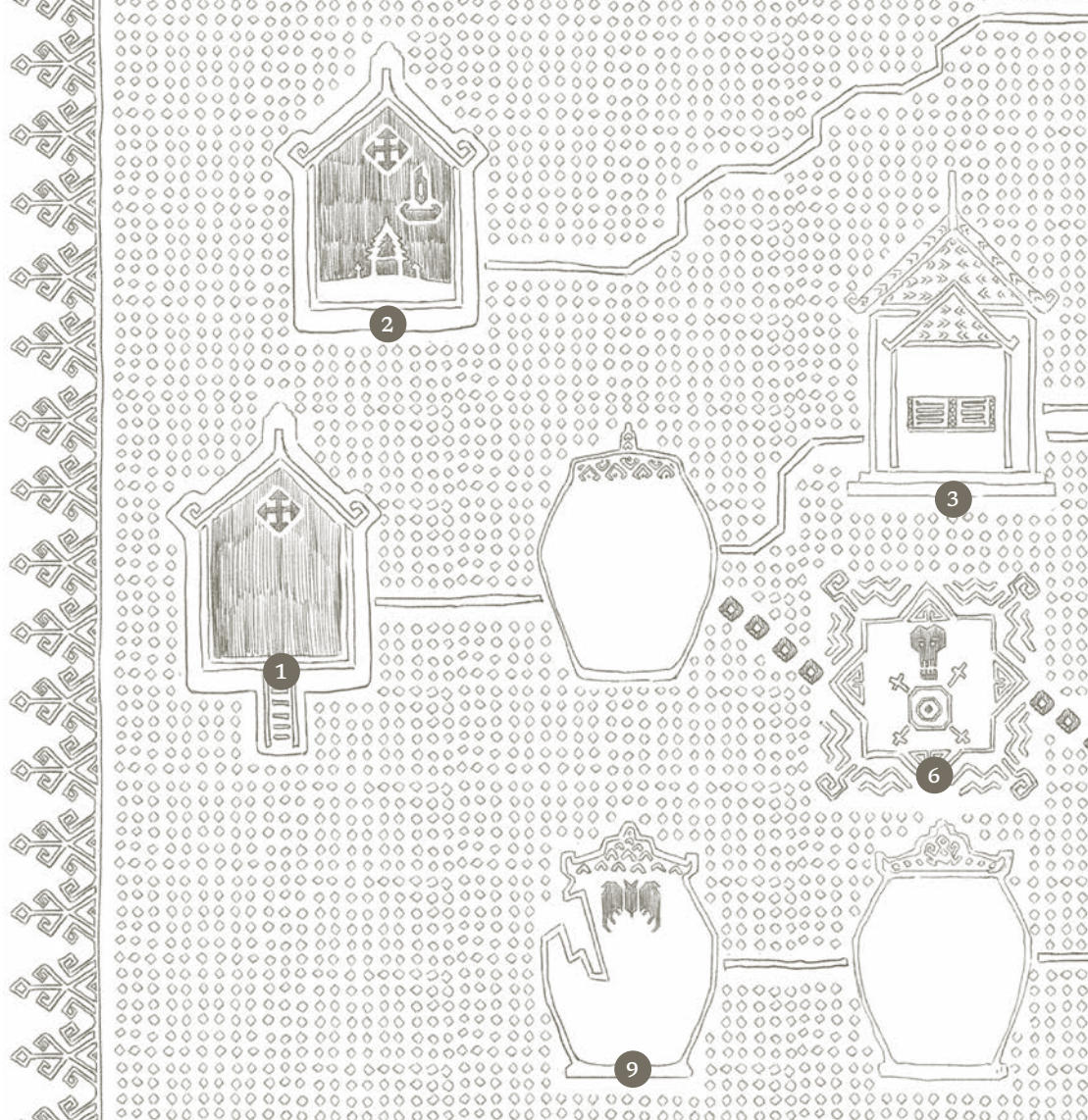
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# WESTERN CITY OF PEACE



## ENTRANCES ➦

- ① One Step Cave<sup>[P144]</sup>
- ② Dome Of Dusk<sup>[P144]</sup>

## WESTERN WARDS OF NOTE

- ③ Court Of Silence<sup>[P145]</sup>
- ④ Ya Manang<sup>[P148]</sup>
- ⑤ Ya Das<sup>[P148]</sup>
- ⑥ Screaming Tomb<sup>[P145]</sup>
- ⑦ Mother Veil<sup>[P146]</sup>
- ⑧ Ya Bos<sup>[P148]</sup>
- ⑨ Ille Ranang<sup>[P144]</sup>





## ONE STEP CAVE

YA DAS'S FUNERAL PARADE BEGINS HERE. A cat with a skull-bowl lamp waits on the ledge. This is MANYA<sup>[P125]</sup>.

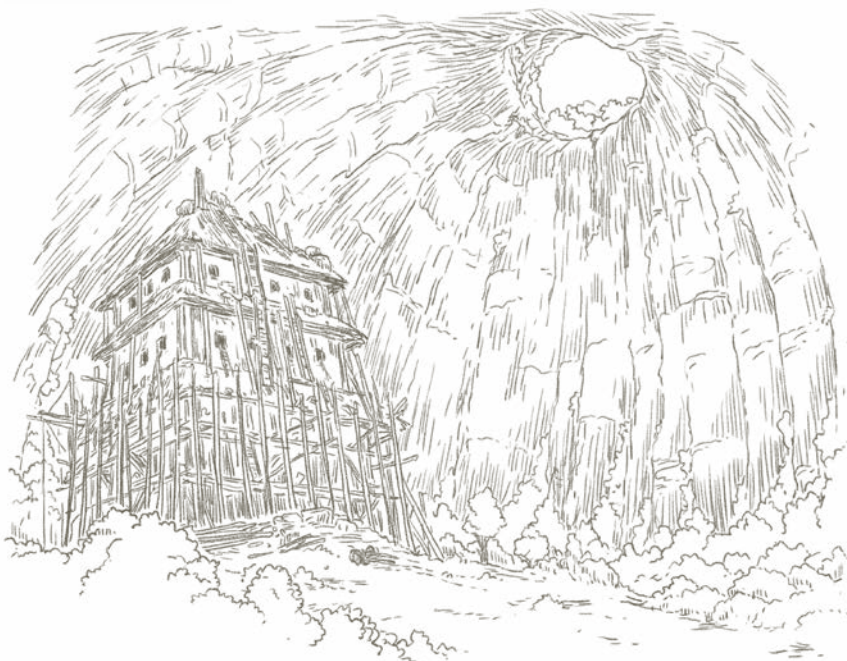
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## DOVE OF DUSK

Sunlight. A NEARLY-FINISHED PALACE on a hill, at the bottom of a doline. Roll no encounters. Always present: TWICE YOUR PARTY'S NUMBER IN CARETAKERS<sup>[P134]</sup>, working on the roof.

Also present: SRI PAPA<sup>[P138]</sup>. It is his palace.



## ILLE RANANG

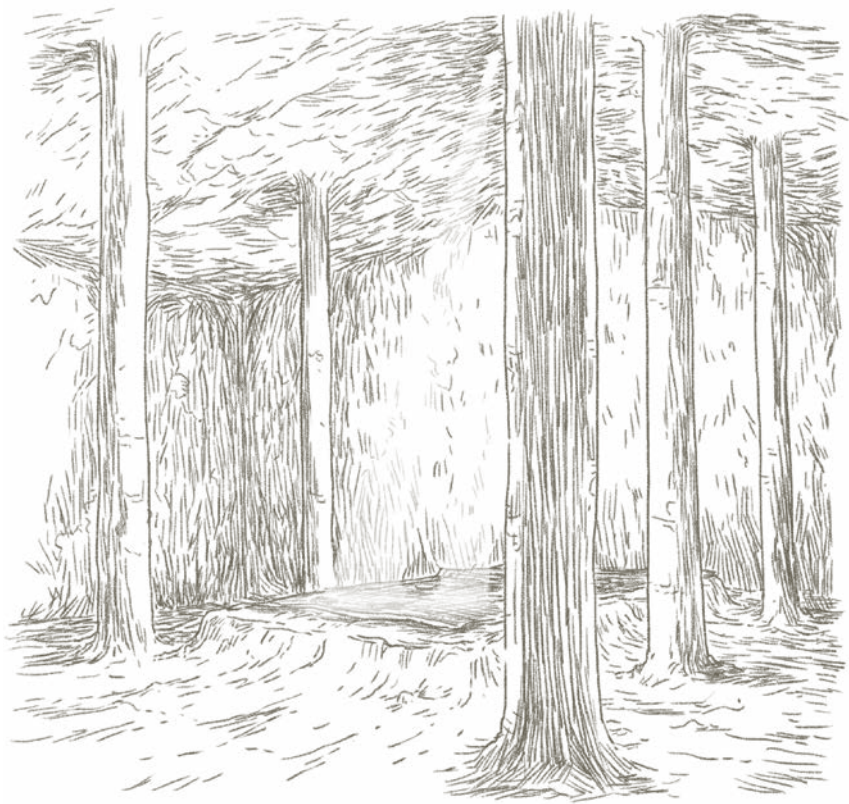
GENERATE A WARD<sup>[P130]</sup>. Now leased to the BAT-FOLK<sup>[P153]</sup>, and turned into a colony.

Caretakers were expanding a tombhouse when they BREACHED TEENG-SEET'S CROWDED VAULT. The bats welcome all this extra space.

---







## CQRT OF SILENCE

A pillared hall. On the floor: a **WOVEN TAPESTRY**, three persons long. A **MAGIC MAP OF THE CITY OF PEACE**<sup>(P126)</sup>, in textile patterns and motifs. Symbols move as situations change and troubles advance.

---

## SCREAMING TOMB

**ROADS**<sup>(P129)</sup> to it are sealed by stones, scribed with holy words. Immune to magic, not mundane digging. **RUMBLING FROM WITHIN**.

Inside: a chamber filled with pulverised grit. The **SCREAMING SERVANT**<sup>(P146)</sup> hangs from a gong stand. If he **BREAKS FREE**<sup>(P169)</sup> the stand shatters.

---





## “THE SCREAMING SERVANT” Hungry Ghost

 *Extraordinary. Frail. Echoing, shattering, dramatic arts.*  
 *Peal. Brass body.*

A floating gong. Its peal shakes earth, forms words—  
 “ATTEND. ATTEND.”

Former confidant of the PRINCESS<sup>(P161)</sup>. He failed to convince her to stay. The court came to ruin. He wishes he forced her to obey.

His peals burst EARDRUMS, BREAK SPELLS, COLLAPSE PATHS OF ESCAPE. Expects your help. “A BRIDE. A BRIDE FOR MY PRINCE.”

---



## MOTHER VEIL

WARM DARKNESS. Move through this place like swimming through a womb. No ground, no ceiling, no up or down.

Floating lamps, linked to old ropes. Grab a rope and follow it to an exit. Things brush at your limbs—  
 VEILING SPIRITS.

---



## VEILING SPIRITS


*Ordinary. Frail. Folding, mimicking, hiding.  
Unarmed. Unprotected.*

A scarf of silky shadow. MAY GO THIN AS A RIBBON,  
OR WIDE AS A BEDSHEET; may repeat scenes faithfully  
as video playback.

Born of a desire to hold, to console. THEY GESTATE IN  
MOTHER VEIL. Pull one out of its mother, and become  
its new parent.





## YA DAS

A thoroughfare curving up and left. Rows on either side: tombhouses.

On arrival: the villagers bow. Their ancestors, **INVISIBLE AIR WEARING BURIAL CLOTHES**, bow back. The next day: chants, rites. Evenings: feasting and dancing—flesh arm-in-arm with the ghostly.

The new Das tombhouse still unfinished. Outrageous! **NANUN DAS**<sup>{P123}</sup> will demand to speak to the **CARETAKER IN CHARGE**<sup>{P138}</sup>.

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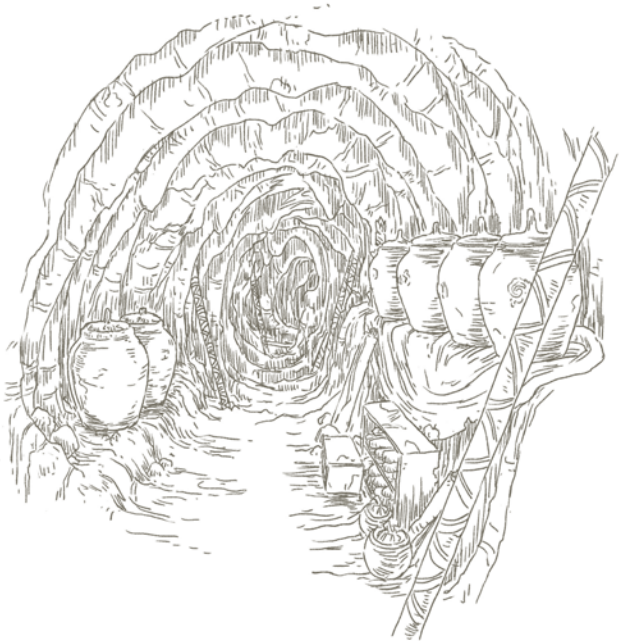


## YA MANANG

GENERATE A WARD<sup>{P130}</sup>.

Typical haunting ground of the **EBULLIENT PAGE**<sup>{P149}</sup>.

---



## YA BOS

GENERATE A WARD<sup>{P130}</sup>.

Current haunting ground of the **HOBBLED SON**<sup>{P150}</sup>.

---



## “THE EBULLIENT PAGE” Hungry Ghost

*Extraordinary. Hale. Talking, guiding, court arts. Unarmed.  
Jerky-like flesh, hard yellow teeth.*

Dragging a desiccated corpse by the elbow. Tosses it as soon as he sees you.

Imagine the most talkative friend you have. The Ebullient Page is very helpful. HE CAN GUIDE YOU THROUGH THE CITY, GOSSIP ABOUT ITS CITIZENS.

He will distract you. Talks, talks, talks. TUGS YOUR ELBOW WHENEVER YOU NOD OFF FROM EXHAUSTION. “My friend. My friend! Hello? You listening?”



## “THE HOBbled SON” Hungry Ghost

*Ordinary. Hale. Self-pitying, listening, ignoring.  
Unarmed. Unprotected.*

Sniffing into wet hands, stumbling over his own footsteps.

A spout instead of a nose. Ugly-cries viscous, combustible tears. Cries it into the City's lamps. The Hobbled Son patrols this underworld; he keeps it fueled.

By tradition, a caretaker tops-up their skull bowl by telling him a TRAGIC STORY. If he finds it worthy he weeps to their fill. But as ages pass he gets harder to please.

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## JAR PEOPLE

Extraordinary. Hale. Learning, observing, lacquer arts.  
Ceremonial arms. Ceramic shell.

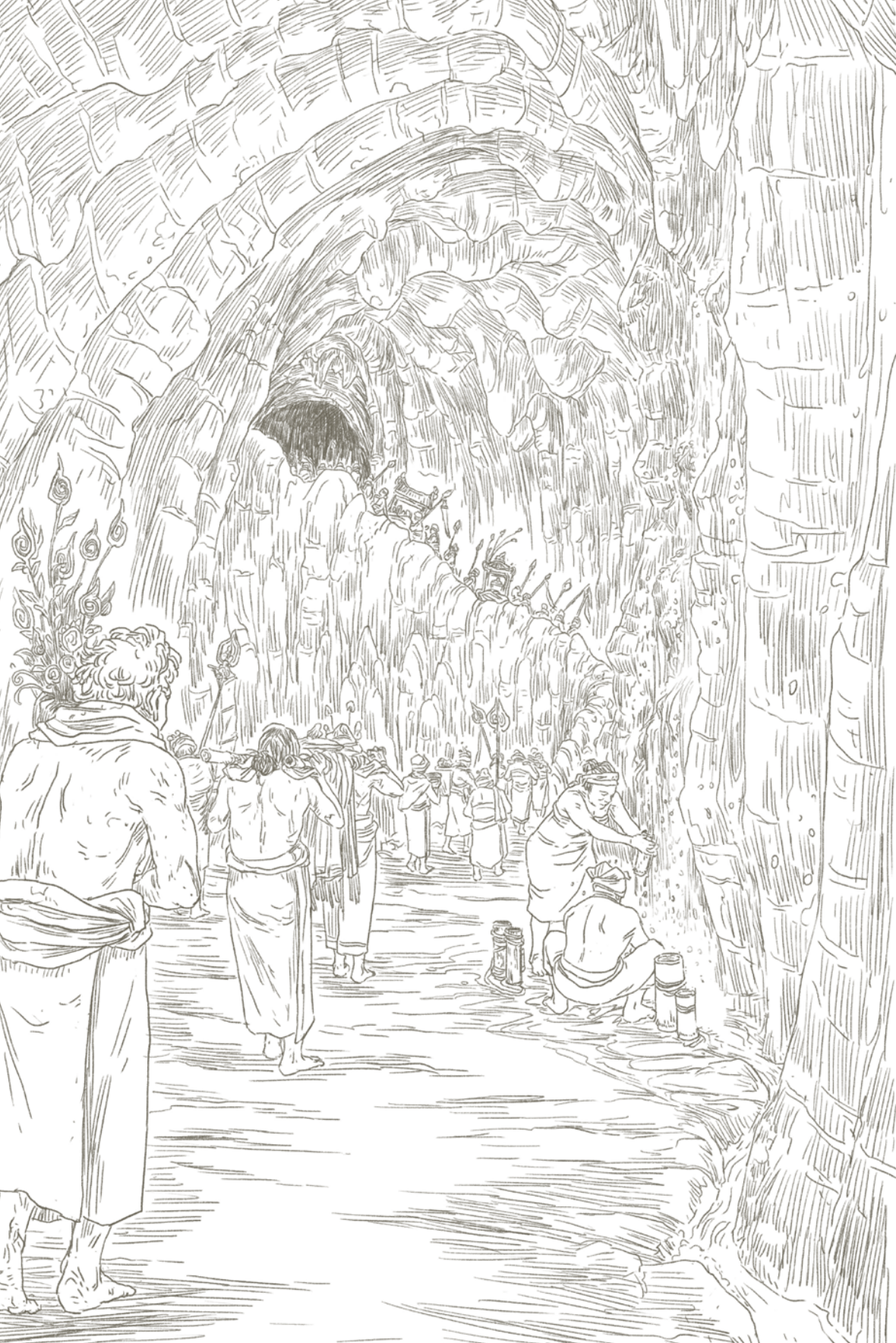
Waddling gait. Vocalisations like the clatter of plates.

SOME JARS GET BORED OF SITTING AROUND. They decide to begin living. Their lid finials are heads. The bones inside them form arms and legs.

A jar person is a blank slate. THEY LEARN FROM THOSE THEY MEET: language and ethics; how to practise kindness; how to do violence.

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# BAT-FOLK OF TEENG-SEET



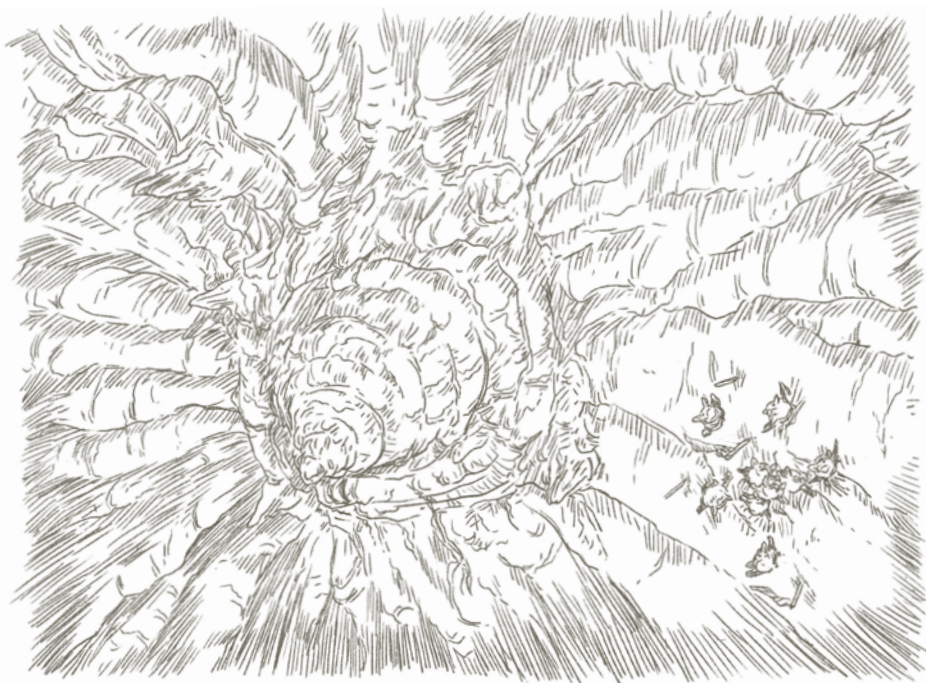
One of the six great City of Bats; the most southerly, the most populous. TEENG-SEET'S SWELLING MIDDLE CLASS WANTS SUBURBS. How else can they raise their pups?

These caves fit the bill: safe, low density, quaint local colour. Some things will need to change, of course—the amenities of civilisation should be installed.

## AFTER EVERY ENCOUNTER WITH BAT-FOLK COLONISTS



More colonists from Teeng-Seet arrive. All wards connected to a BAT-FOLK COLONY are themselves TRANSFORMED INTO NEW BAT-FOLK COLONIES.



## BAT-FOLK COLONY

STALACTITES HOLLOWED OUT INTO AIRY APARTMENTS. Facades of scroll-work and bas-relief. The ghosts below rapidly become silhouetted in glittering guano; these bat-folk literally SHIT SILVER.

Basically a gated community. Roll no encounters. Watching every entrance: SIX BAT-FOLK GUARDS<sup>[P154]</sup>.



## BAT-FOLK

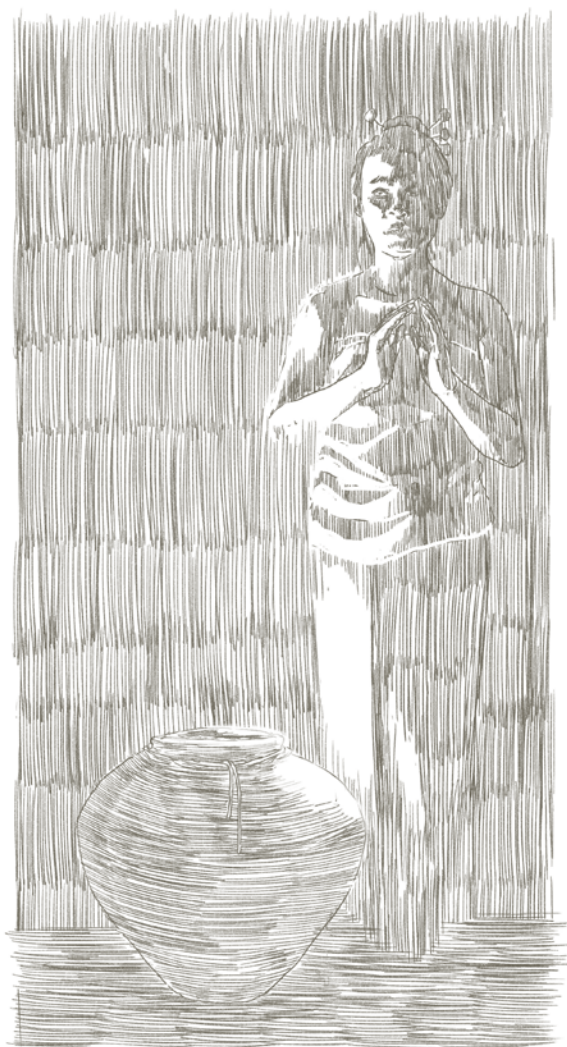
☞ *Ordinary. Hale. Flying, echolocating, arguing. Control Air.*  
☞ *Charming necklace.*

Cat-sized, helium shrill, and always complaining.

“Your parade is too loud.” “And blocking the way!” “We want to speak to the person in charge.” Will crawl down a wall to be RUDE TO YOUR FACE.

Via mystic chirrups, a Teeng-Seet bat may COMMAND A VOLUME OF AIR EQUAL TO THEIR OWN SIZE. Guards are trained to STEAL BREATH FROM TRESPASSERS’ LUNGS.

---



## ‘NEEDY GHOSTS’

Ordinary. Hale. Begging,  
throwing, spooking. Touch.  
Unprotected.

Sometimes the citizens of the City are distressed enough to be visible. ALWAYS LIT FROM THE DIRECTION OF THEIR BURIAL JAR, in high contrast, as if the jar were a moon.

Their jar offers clues; it is:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 Too SMALL for a grown person. They died a child. Strangled?       | 4 Covered in carved CROCODILES. A warrior. Who ran them through?       |
| 2 Topped with WATERFOWL MOTIFS. She worked on the river. Drowned?   | 5 IN SIX COLOURS. Part of a prince's court. What poison did she drink? |
| 3 Too PLAIN to be respectable. A criminal—but was he really guilty? | 6 Decorated with FROG FIGURES. A farmer. What illness felled him?      |

What do they miss, that they desperately need?

1 A FAVOURITE FOOD. It is served nowhere in the City. They have a LONG TONGUE. At a lick: vomit everything you last ate.

4 REVENGE. A wrong done to them was never righted. They are blind. At a touch: THEY STEAL YOUR SIGHT. Lasts a day.

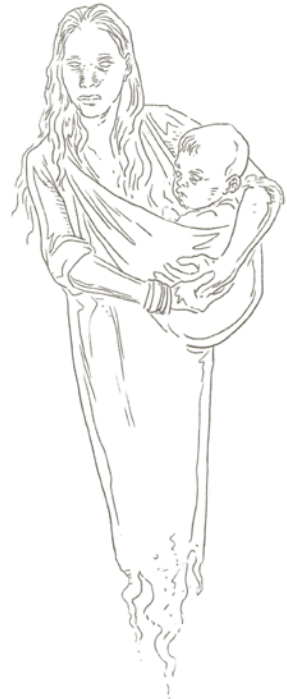
2 LOVE. From somebody specific—somebody still alive. They are AS ICY AS A FREEZER. Will hug you, and will not let go.

5 A KEEPSAKE. They were buried with it. It is missing. At a touch: YOU BEGIN TO MORPH INTO SAID KEEPSAKE. Takes a week.

3 A BODY PART. Feathers have sprouted in its place. At a touch: YOU LOSE USE OF THAT PART IN YOUR OWN BODY. Lasts a day.

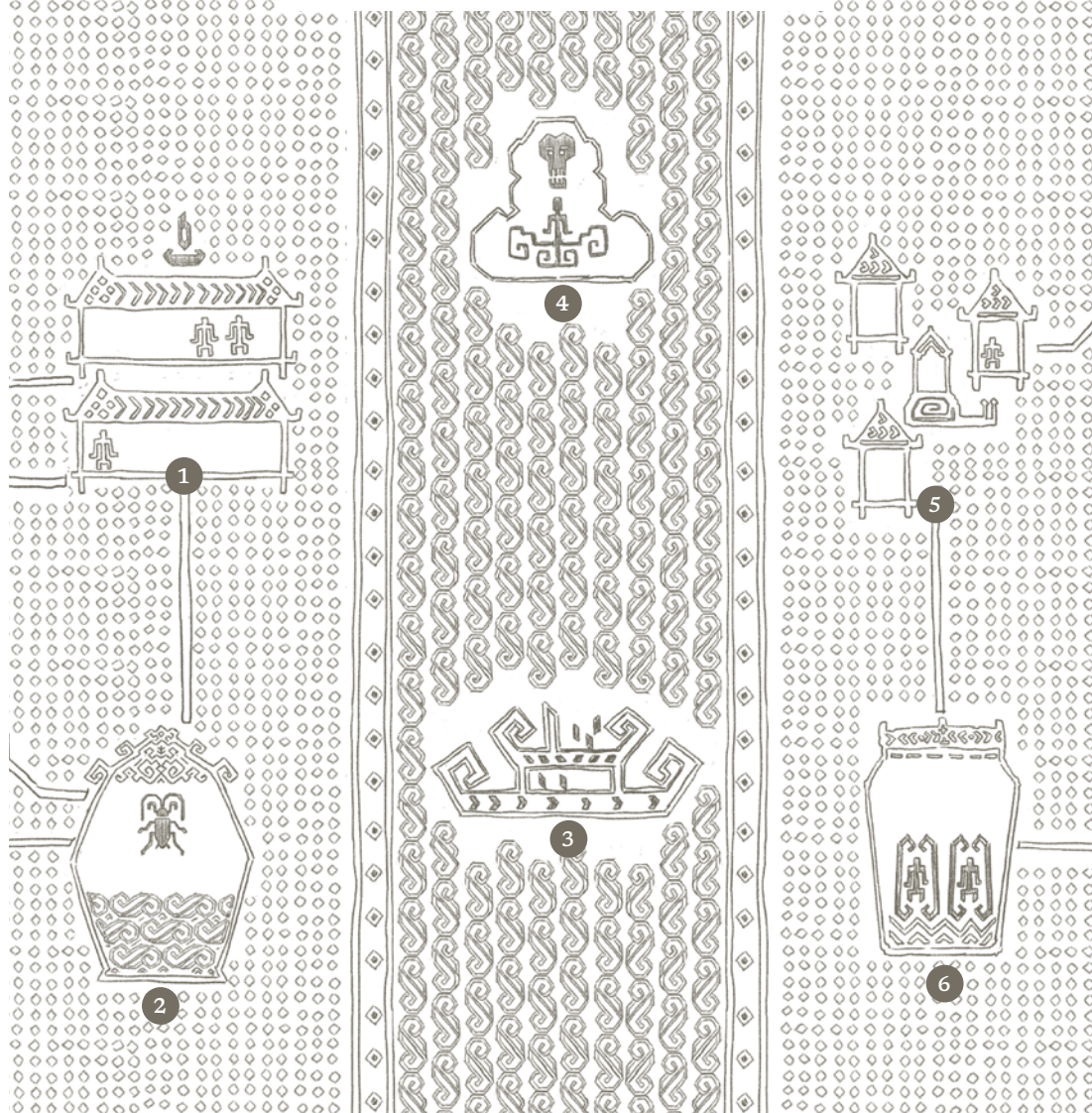
6 FORGIVENESS. From somebody specific—somebody dead. Whenever they touch you, YOUR LIMBS ARE TOO HEAVY TO LIFT.

Fewer would form if the CARETAKERS<sup>(P137)</sup> were not so negligent. Needy ghosts CAN BE FOOLED, provided the deception is staged with sufficient pomp and melodrama. Satisfied, they return to being normal, invisible ghosts.








# RIVER OF HOURS



## RIVER LOCATIONS OF NOTE

- ① Caretaker Village<sup>[P158]</sup>
- ② Field Awaiting Flood<sup>[P158]</sup>
- ③ Leech Temple Barge<sup>[P160]</sup>
- ④ The Drifting Daughter<sup>[P161]</sup>
- ⑤ Market Of Hours<sup>[P159]</sup>
- ⑥ Bu-Ni-Ang-Ka<sup>[P159]</sup>

## TROUBLES

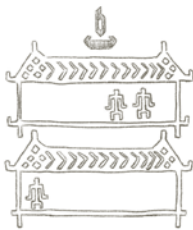
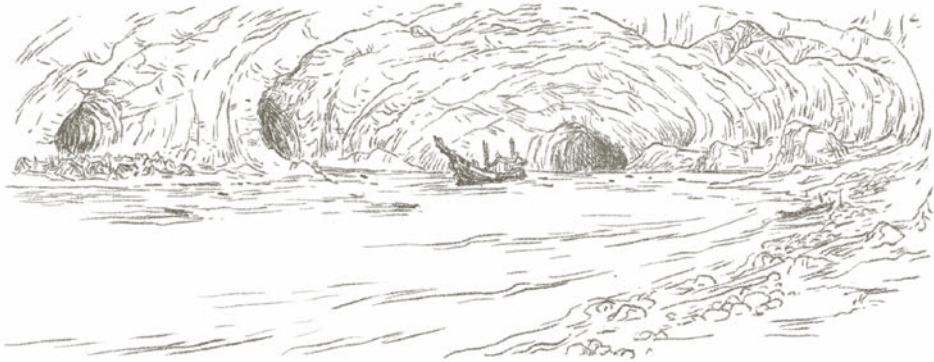
-  Caretakers<sup>[P137]</sup>
-  Roaches<sup>[P174]</sup>
-  Hungry Ghosts<sup>[P169]</sup>



# CROSSING THE RIVER OF HQRS

Scintillating pillars of red move on the water—the resin torches of PALE-FOLK VESSELS. This is a major trade artery, downstream from DEEPER SANG-LA<sup>[P280]</sup>.

ONE SILVER COIN gets you a single crossing in a six-person dinghy. A whole parade will take more boats and three hours. Anchored offshore: a LEECH TEMPLE BARGE<sup>[P160]</sup>.



## CARETAKER VILLAGE

Long-huts on the shore. Sounds of rural life: scrubbing, cooking, couples arguing. Kilns where clay offerings are fired; benches where they are painted.

Always present: NIWANG<sup>[P139]</sup>, teaching the art of shadow theatre to VEILING SPIRITS<sup>[P147]</sup>.

---

## FIELD AWAITING FLOOD

A LAGOON off the river. HALF-SUBMERGED BURIAL JARS. Foreigners who die in the valley come here; may the river take their souls home.

Ghosts splashing. Odd coins glint in cold mud. Lurking in a jar: a ROACH INFILTRATOR<sup>[P175]</sup>.

---



## BU-NI-ANG-KA

The City is part of the underground world; exchange was inevitable. The people of BU-NI-ANG-KA<sup>(P177)</sup> bury their dead here.

GENERATE A WARD<sup>(P130)</sup>. Instead of burial jars, bodies are sandwiched between TWO DUGOUTS LASHED TOGETHER. Spider-silk clothes, chitin jewellery, worm-jelly wine.



## MARKET OF HQRS

Huts, wares on mats, red torches. A riot of cosmopolitan voices.

Whose voice do you hear first?

1 SAJAN THE CURLY, beard, from BU-NI-ANG-KA<sup>(P177)</sup>. Arguing over the price of wooden dugouts. Must bury his brother.

4 KREREK THE GANGLE, snaggle-teeth, from TI-ANG-NU-LU. “Candied worms, mushroom cakes! Cricket legs, snake eggs!”

2 MIRO KUDA, enormous hat, from Ya Kuda. IRONMONGER. Scolding their snail, who struggles under a load of ingots.

5 IJO MUK, sprained ankle, from Ille Woko. TEXTILES, poorly lashed to her snail. It comes unknotted. An explosion of cloth.

3 KEET MEET PEET, painted wings, from TEENG-SEET<sup>(P153)</sup>. Sight-seeing, haggling down the price of a fossil necklace.

6 HAGGUR THE SMALL, big eyes, from DEEPER SANG-LA<sup>(P280)</sup>. TOOLMONGER. Silk rope, resin fuel, shell woks, ice rice.

## LEECH TEMPLE BARGE



Broken mast, empty oar-holes. A LIVING SKIN OF LEECHES coats the hull below the waterline; its collective undulations move the barge.

Aboard: MIKAT. Below: a chest of GOLD INGOTS; bamboo bottles of CORPSE OIL.

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### “MIKAT” Temple Agent

*Extraordinary. Hale. Accounting, grabbing, sucking. Control Blood. Elastic skin.*

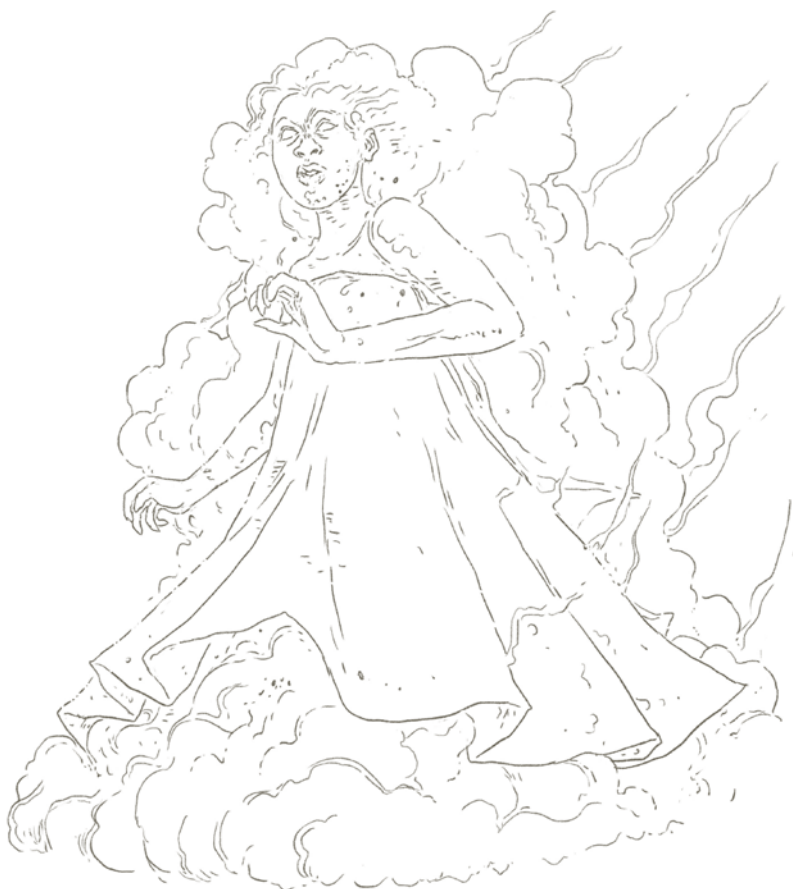
Their words don’t quite line up with their lip movements.

As answer to any question they repeat their trade offer: ONE GOLD PIECE FOR EVERY FULL BOTTLE OF CORPSE OIL.

Attacked, their mouth reconfigures into three saw-like jaws. MIKAT MAY COMMAND THEIR WEIGHT IN BLOOD—haemorrhage yours right out of your face.

---





## “THE DRIFTING DAUGHTER” Hungry Ghost

*Extraordinary. Hale. Levitating, gusting, administration.  
Gas form. Incorporeality, billowing dress.*

A body of smog. She smells of wicks burning out.

What irony! HER BROTHER<sup>(P150)</sup> leaks excess vitality he is too lazy to ever use. Whereas she would rule from THEIR FATHER'S THRONE<sup>(P170)</sup> well—yet everything she touches crumbles to ruin.

May extend to FILL A WARD: causes sleep to all within.  
Or FILL A PERSON-SIZED VOLUME: you age decades in the course of seconds.

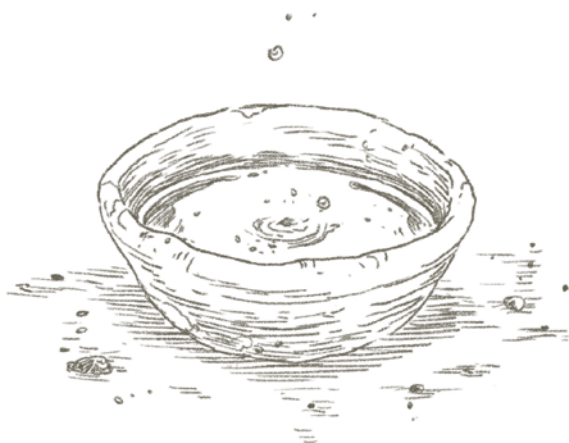
# GRAVE ROBBERS, CORPSE OIL



Hold a flame under the chin of a dead person. Buttery fluid drips from crisping flesh.

Corpse oil is **ESSENTIAL TO LEECH TEMPLE MAGICS**—particularly the ones that let them impersonate others. They pay well, those **LEECHES**<sup>(P160)</sup>. They buy in bulk.

A corpse-oil rush has begun; grave robbers are pivoting to its harvest.



AFTER ONE ENCOUNTER WITH GRAVE ROBBERS ~~~~~ ✕

The **NEXT WARD**<sup>(P130)</sup> you enter is in disarray. Jars shattered, jawless corpses, furniture upturned, valuables gone.

AFTER TWO ENCOUNTERS WITH GRAVE ROBBERS ~~~~~ ✕ ✕

Replace your next encounter with: A funeral parade, attacked by a **GRAVE-ROBBER GANG**, three dozen strong. Fresher corpses yield more oil.

AFTER THREE ENCOUNTERS WITH GRAVE ROBBERS ~~~~~ ✕ ✕ ✕

**FALAKUN** and her allies have numbers enough to **CAPTURE THE MARKET OF HOURS**<sup>(P159)</sup>; legitimate merchants flee or die.



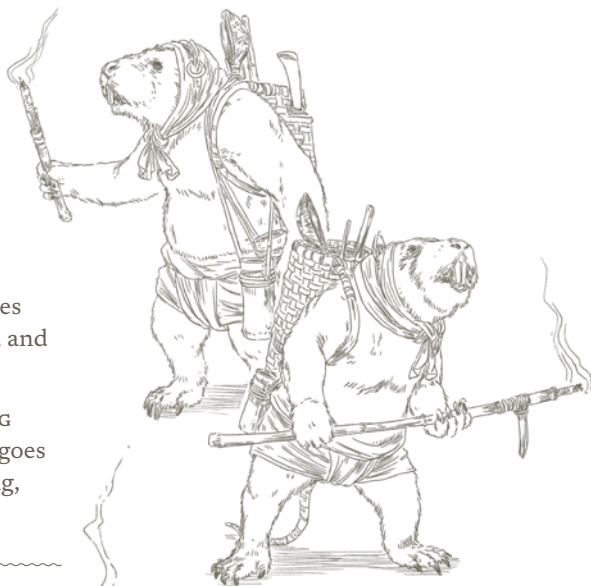
## GRAVE ROBBERS

*Ordinary. Hale. Hauling, hiding, smashing. Pickaxe. Paper charm.*

Hurried whispers. Constantly fidgeting, like nervous birds.

**WILLING TO BARGAIN.** Carrying: pilfered jewellery; bamboo bottles for corpse oil; more rope, tinder, and candles than they seem to need.

**PRACTISED AT CATCHING SNUFFING SPIRITS**<sup>[P133]</sup>—as soon as a candle goes out they are on the damned thing, and have it tied up in seconds.



## “SMOOTH FALAKUN” Robber Baroness

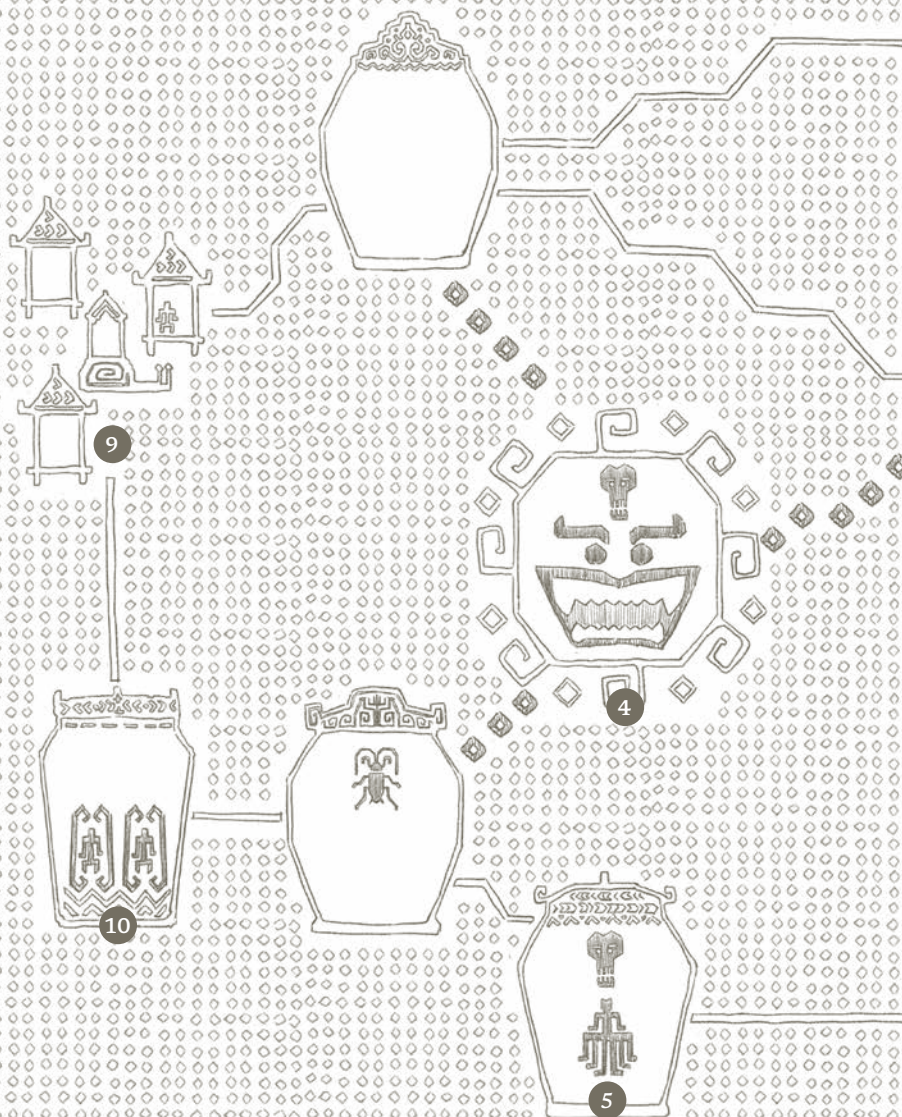
*Extraordinary. Hale. Fist arts, organising, etiquette. Bone-shattering punch. Charmed left earring, charmed right earring.*

Polite words through sneering teeth.  
Eyebrows tattooed on.

Life as a court slave left her back scarred, her body hairless. **SHE WILL HAVE HER OWN COURT**, one day. The wealth of dead aristos will finance it.

**LEADS THE ROBBERS**; Falakun has convinced them cooperation is more profitable than competition. **HATES THE ENVIED HANDMAIDEN**<sup>[P168]</sup>—wants her destroyed.

# EASTERN CITY OF PEACE



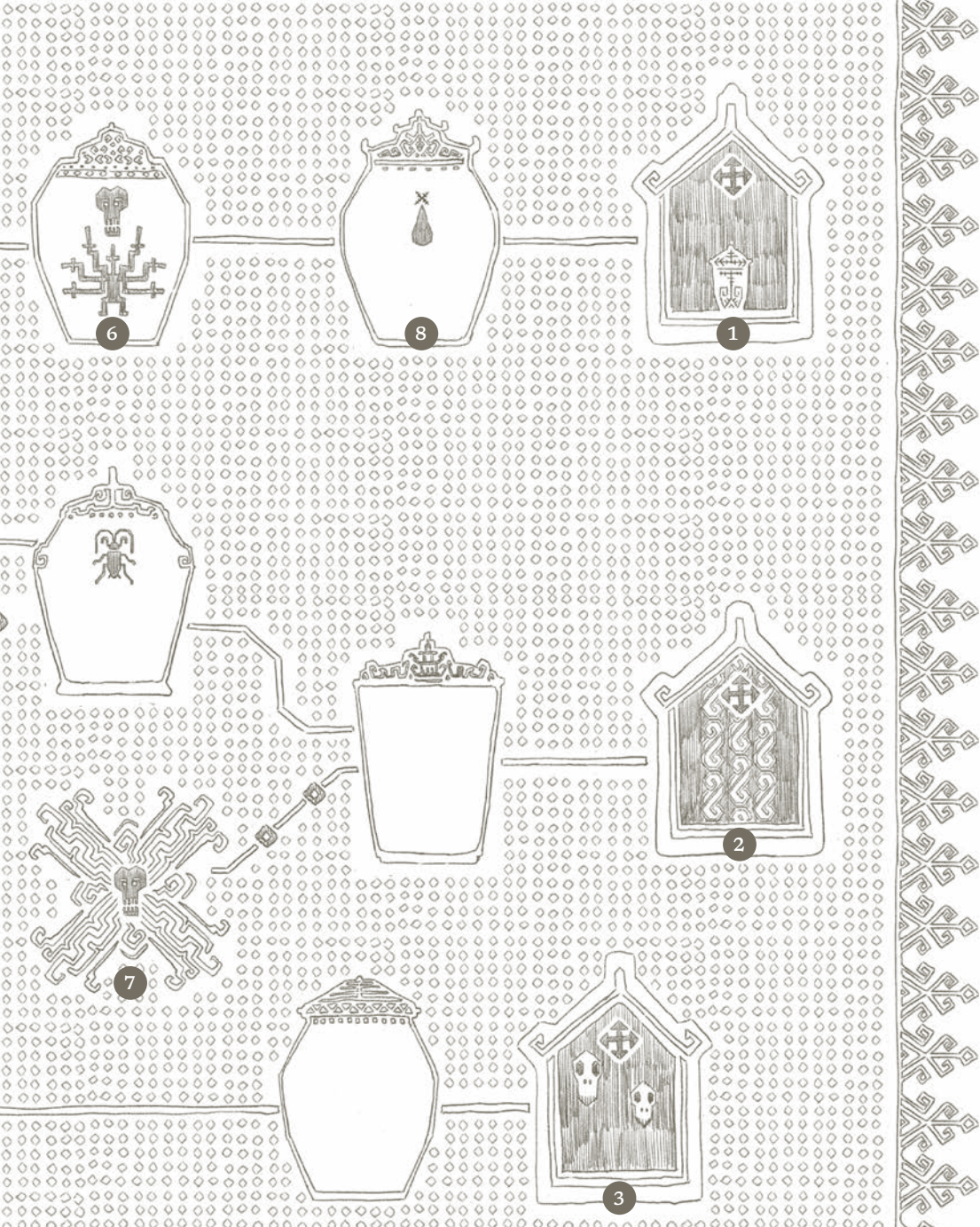
## ENTRANCES

- ① Fool Step Cave<sup>[P166]</sup>
- ② Cold Curtain Cave<sup>[P166]</sup>
- ③ Quiet Roost Cave<sup>[P166]</sup>

## EASTERN WARDS OF NOTE

- ④ Spurned Prince's Palace<sup>[P170]</sup>
- ⑤ Ille Tun Das<sup>[P166]</sup>
- ⑥ Ya Wang<sup>[P166]</sup>
- ⑦ Tomb Of Beauty<sup>[P167]</sup>
- ⑧ Ille Nayam<sup>[P167]</sup>





## RIVER OF HQRS<sup>{P157}</sup>

⑨ Market Of Hours<sup>{P159}</sup>

⑩ Bu-Ni-Ang-Ka<sup>{P159}</sup>

## TRQJBLES



Roaches  
{P174}



Hungry Ghosts  
{P169}



Tomb Robbers  
{P162}



## FOOL STEP CAVE

Where Dendeng began his journey, according to tradition. A single burial jar, granite, sits just inside the cave mouth.

---



## COLD CURTAIN CAVE

A gate into the underworld. Behind a waterfall. Just inside: a skull on a pedestal. Touch its top, part the waterfall.

---



## QUIET ROOST CAVE

A gate into the underworld. Hornbill skulls wedged in its many niches. They dance when spells are cast nearby.

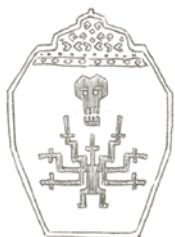
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## ILLE TUN DAS

GENERATE A WARD<sup>[P130]</sup>. Typical haunting ground of the TIRELESS MINISTER<sup>[P172]</sup>.

---



## YA WANG

GENERATE A WARD<sup>[P130]</sup>. Typical haunting ground of the COMPOUND CHAMPION<sup>[P173]</sup>.

---

## ILLE NAYAM

GENERATE A WARD<sup>(P130)</sup>. Tombhouses turned out, made into living quarters. The bubble of soup and the lilt of rough jokes.

Roll no encounters. Always present: SMOOTH FALAKUN<sup>(P163)</sup>, and twice your party's number in GRAVE ROBBERS. This is their current headquarters.

Three piles: stolen clothes; JEWELLERY; CANDLES.  
In orderly rows: bamboo bottles filled with CORPSE OIL.

---



## TOMB OF BEAUTY

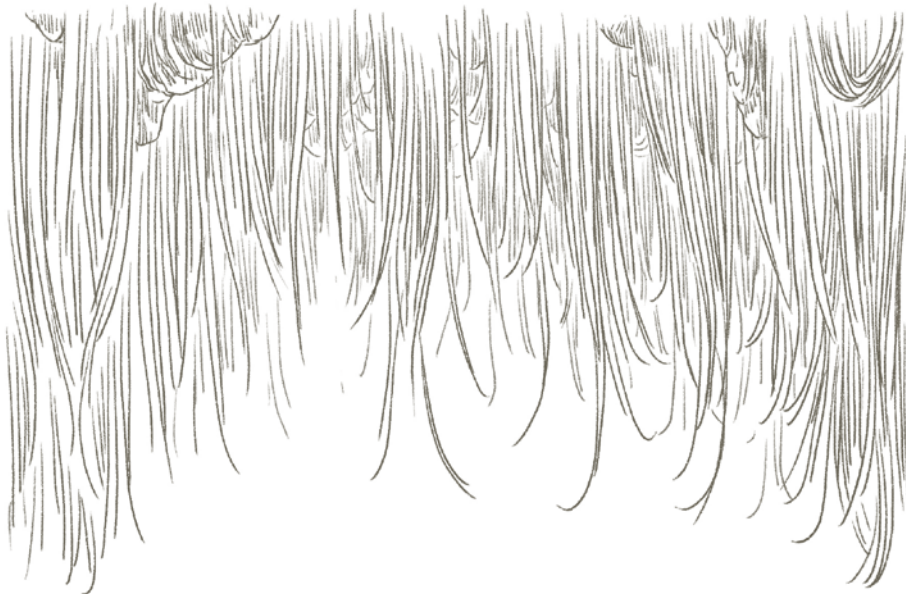


ROADS<sup>(P129)</sup> to it were sealed with stones.  
NOW SCATTERED.

Inside: the flowing shine of a shampoo commercial.  
HAIR EVERYWHERE. Bouncy; FALL AND YOU ARE QUICKLY ENTANGLED. In the middle: a canopied bed, stool, dressing table—all formed from hair.

Haunting ground of the ENVIED HANDMAIDEN.

---







‘THE ENVIED HANDMAIDEN’  
Hungry Ghost

Extraordinary. Frail. Hair arts, accessorising, court games.  
Prehensile hair. Braided hair, matted hair.

In any ward or road she is in, HAIR GROWS.

Sprouts from all unmoving surfaces: off walls, from ceilings,  
on sleeping persons. In an hour it is at least shoulder-length.

Her body is bald—but hair loves her. It folds around her like  
a dress. She wants more to love. AT HER TOUCH YOUR HAIR  
FALLS OFF YOU, flows into hers.

# HUNGRY GHOSTS



Some souls want to keep wanting.  
Hunger devours their names, defines  
their shapes, deforms the world around  
them. They prowl the City of Peace.

A few may be bargained with, appeased.  
A few cannot. CARETAKERS<sup>{P134}</sup> WALL THE  
VERY WORST AWAY. Slowly, surely, they  
are gnawing themselves free.

## AFTER TWO ENCOUNTERS WITH HUNGRY GHOSTS ~~~~~

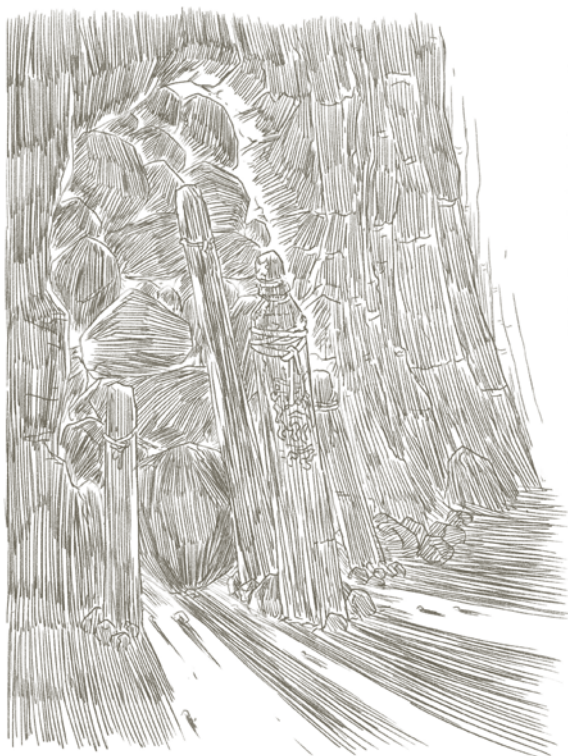


The SCREAMING SERVANT<sup>{P146}</sup> breaks free. Their haunting ground is  
the SCREAMING TOMB. Whenever you roll an encounter their haunting  
ground moves ONE WARD CLOSER TO THE SPURNED PRINCE'S PALACE.

## AFTER THREE ENCOUNTERS WITH HUNGRY GHOSTS ~~~~~



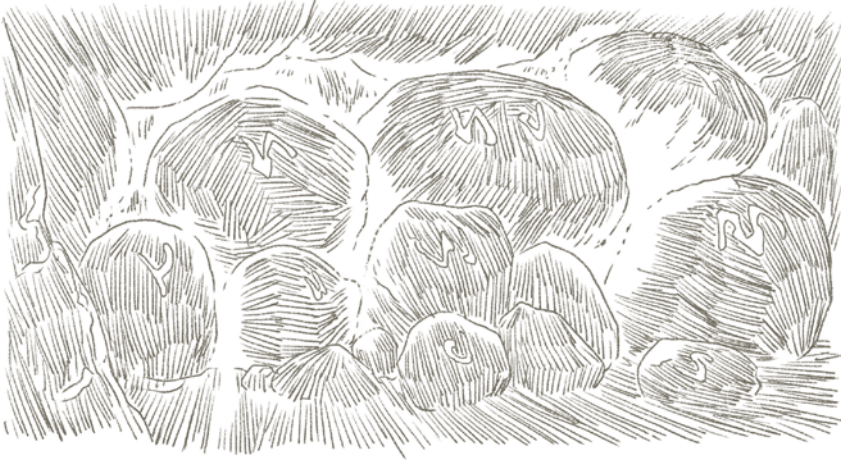
HEAVING SPIRITS<sup>{P140}</sup> disobey their masters. They gather around the  
SPURNED PRINCE'S PALACE—striking the seals with their tools and fists.



## IF THE SCREAMING SERVANT REACHES THE SPURNED PRINCE'S PALACE

THE PALACE SEALS BREAK.  
Whenever you roll encounters  
with hungry ghosts, the SPURNED  
PRINCE'S GLARE GROWS<sup>{P171}</sup>:  
spilling into neighbouring  
roads, wards.

# SPURNED PRINCE'S PALACE

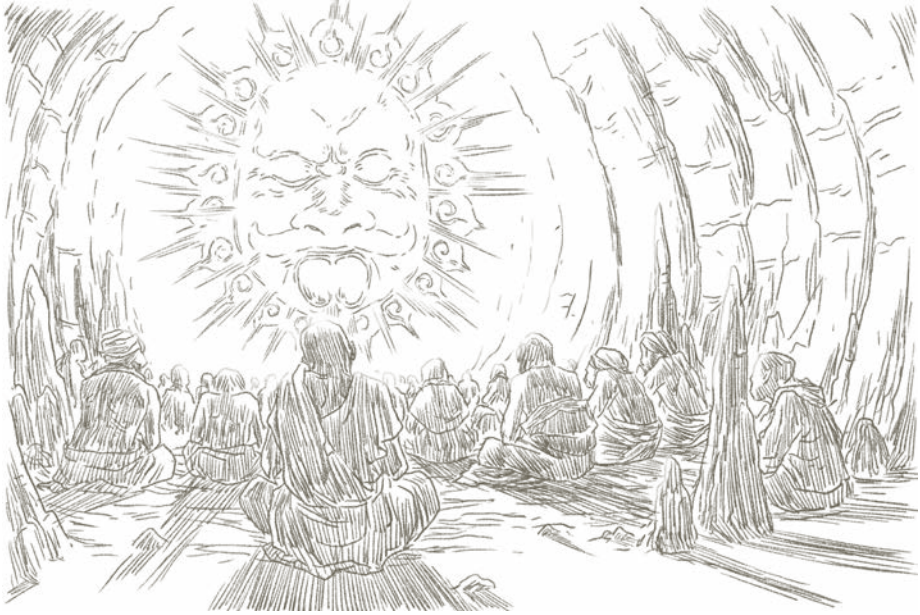


ROADS<sup>{P129}</sup> to it are sealed by stones, scribed  
with holy words. Immune to magic and mundane  
digging. A GLOW FILTERS THROUGH.

Inside: THE SPURNED PRINCE'S GLARE. Shield your  
eyes. There are FIGURES, here—mummified. People  
who knelt, and stared, and starved, and died.

All face A GIANT HEAD: masculine, eyes shut,  
beatific. Bright and blinding as the sun.  
Look at it directly and you stare. You kneel.  
You adore the Spurned Prince.

## SPURNED PRINCE'S GLARE



Golden illumination like a soap-opera heaven.  
Where the Spurned Prince's glare is:

KINDLING SPIRITS<sup>{P140}</sup> are ashed; VEILING SPIRITS<sup>{P147}</sup>  
die; the COUNTING SPIRIT<sup>{P138}</sup> cannot be heard.  
Roll no encounters.

Always present in the Spurned Prince's glare:  
as many SNUFFING SPIRITS<sup>{P133}</sup> as it takes to  
kill your lights. You must love the Spurned Prince alone.  
As many HEAVING SPIRITS<sup>{P140}</sup> as your party;  
they will drag you to the  
SPURNED PRINCE'S PALACE.



## “THE TIRELESS MINISTER” Hungry Ghost

☞ *Extraordinary. Hale. Negotiating, stewardship, grappling.  
☞ Many limbs. Redundant limbs.*

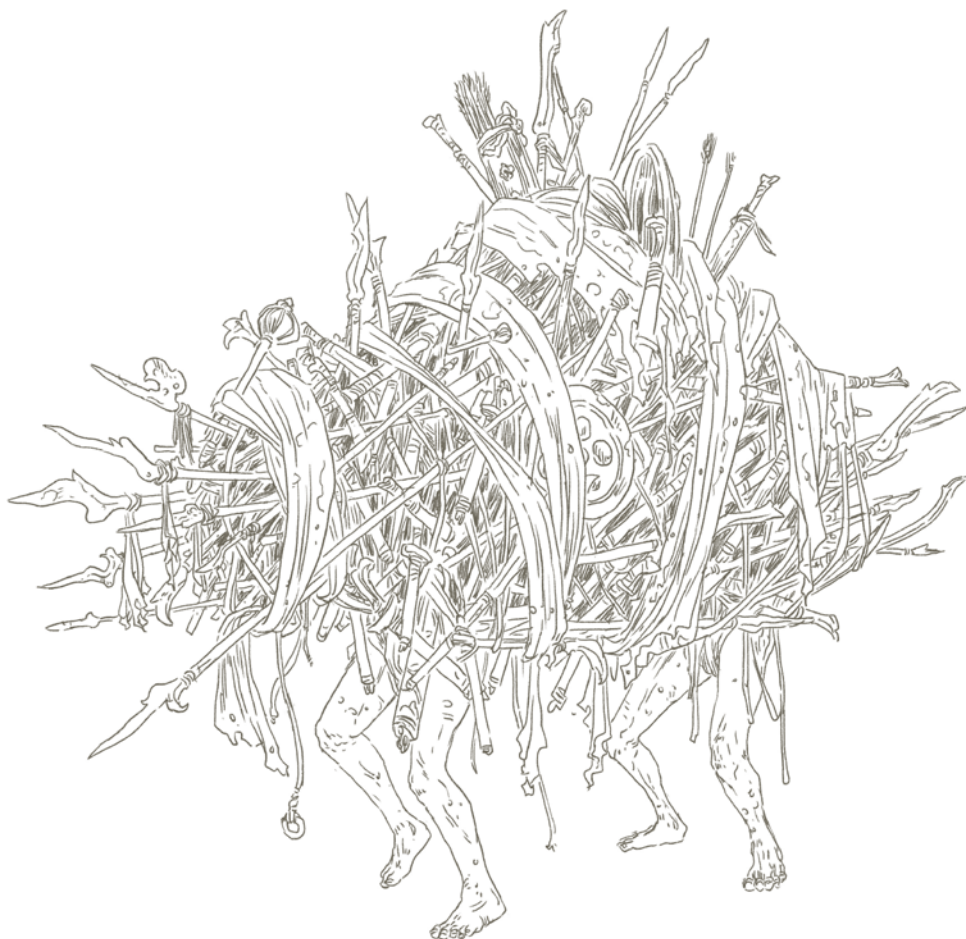
The slap of hands on cold stone. Wide, wide smile.

Politely wanton. He was a cannibal when he served his prince, in life. HE REMAINS A CANNIBAL, these many ages later.

Knows the City and most of its secrets. Will answer any question you have truthfully—but YOU MUST OFFER ONE OF YOUR OWN LIMBS, in exchange. He will add it to his own.

---





## “THE COMPOUND CHAMPION” Hungry Ghost

*Powerful. Hale. War arts, duelling, triage. Weapons in their dozens. Leather bucklers, bronze shields, teak shields.*

Implements of murder all over, except the legs.

Rivals. They followed their liege into death. They kept competing—collecting arms, hoping to find one that would give them an edge.

They remember their rivalry, not their rival. **THEY CHALLENGE EVERYBODY THEY MEET.** They will defeat you, take your weapons. Then find others to fight.

---

# ROACH INFILTRATION






The peoples of the deep are wise to ODOYOQ'S<sup>[P223]</sup> wiles.  
But folk from the daylands do not know to guard against  
him. HIS SPIES ALREADY LURK IN THE CITY OF PEACE.


They follow you until you are alone. Then replace you.





They live your life, pursue your agendas. Odoyoq is patient.  
Regardless of what conflicts are fought, which sides are  
victorious—in the end, roaches win.

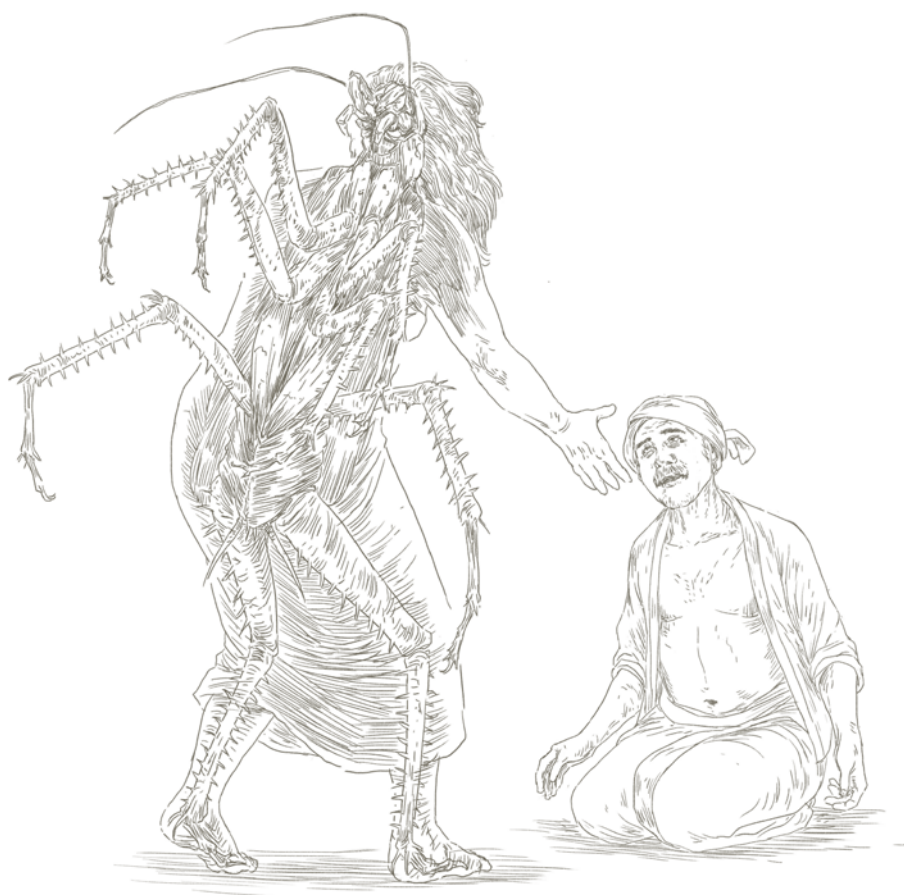


WARDS<sup>[P130]</sup> with ROACH INFILTRATORS  present are marked<sup>[P126]</sup>.  
They will let OTHER TROUBLES WORSEN.

AFTER THREE ENCOUNTERS WITH NEGLIGENT CARETAKERS ~~~~~     
The ENTIRE STAFF AT THE DOME OF DUSK<sup>[P144]</sup> reveal themselves to be  
ROACH INFILTRATORS. They create larders, armouries, and hatcheries—a nest.

WHEN A WARD WITH A ROACH INFILTRATOR BECOMES  
A BAT-FOLK COLONY ~~~~~   
ALL BAT-FOLK GUARDS<sup>[P153]</sup> are now secretly ROACH INFILTRATORS.  
They will subvert Teeng-Seet's military. In a year, the city falls to civil war.

AFTER FOUR ENCOUNTERS WITH GRAVE ROBBERS ~~~~~      
HALF OF ALL GRAVE ROBBERS<sup>[P162]</sup> reveal themselves to be ROACH  
INFILTRATORS. They fight over the MARKET OF HOURS<sup>[P159]</sup>.  
Leeches are rival vermin.



## ROACH INFILTRATORS

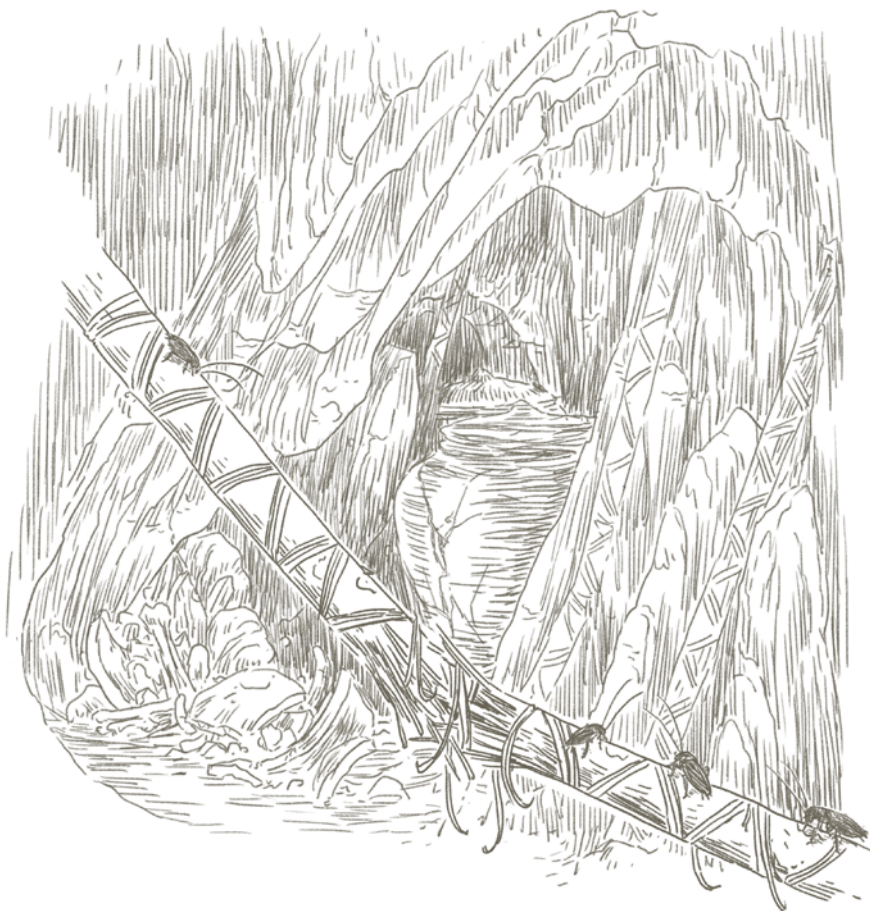
☞ *Extraordinary. Hale. Ambushing, fleeing, contorting.*  
☞ *Barbed arms. Chitin back.*

Person-sized, disconcertingly still, deceptively scentless.

IF IT EATS A VICTIM'S TONGUE IT STEALS THEIR SOUL. Absorbs their skills, has their memories—acts like them. But it loves roaches, and OBEYS ODOYOQ'S SERVANTS.

Exudes a magic reek: CREATURES WHO SMELL SEE IT AS ITS VICTIM. An illusion. Touch its head and feel unseen antennae, brush its arms and be poked by barbs.

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CHAPTER 4

BU-NI-ANG-KA



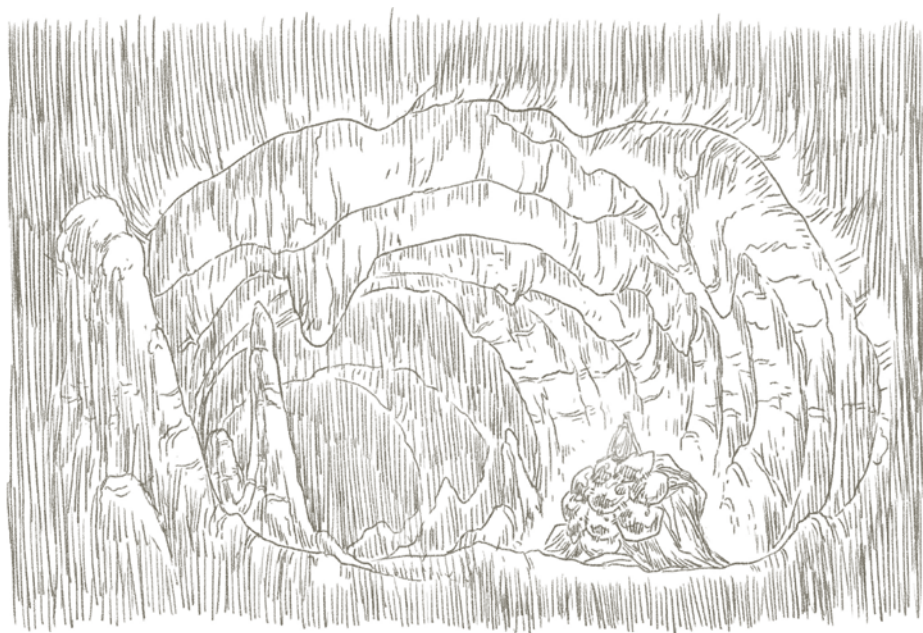
Under Forest, Over River,  
Runaways from the Sun







# TEN TORCHES FROM THE FALLS



A lantern, balanced on an insect-shell shield, covering  
a mound of rags. Watch the light. It rises and falls.

The mound snores.



## “USHU THE SHAGGY” Demon Hunter

*Extraordinary. Hale. Hunting, trap-craft, sketching.  
Venomous machete. Milk-iron gauntlet, shell shield.*

Approach and you have a blade at your throat.

He pats you down, feeling for invisible antennae. “Take care. You could be a monster. You’d not even know!” He cackles, slaps you in the back.

His eyes are cold. Ushu has no family; he uses friends as bait. Spells, once per day: Command Limb; Bestow Seizure.

---

# THREE BEGINNINGS OF THE PALE-FOLK



“When the gods die their rotting bodies make the world. Their limbs become passages; their bellies become caverns. The milt of their death-spasms birth our people.”

Nomads in the deep tell this story. Down in the dark they find sumps of puddinged blood, and teeth the size of towers.



“Life is an escape. Our souls are runaways from the sun. Hidden from his jealous eye we may grow fleshy bodies, taste earthly joys—live as full persons, for a time.”

Those near the daylands learn this ontology. Pale-folk are hurt by direct sunlight: wherever it touches, bruises bloom.



“When the golden city of Yajanarja fell its people fled underground. There they were lost, and changed, and forgot. Ho: see how a great race may be brought low!”

Daylander scholars insist on this history. It is a parable about hubris—very teachable. Can a narrative so moral be untrue?

# FINGER ART

Instead of an alphabet, pale-folk have the finger art.

Chalk from fossilised god-shell; charcoal imported from distant daylands. Applied to a surface, spoken at with spells—the resulting drawing is alive and animated.



## SIGN HAND

Splay your hand flat on a wall. Sketch its silhouette. Speak first the magic words, then the knowledge you want your sign hand to know.

Your sign hand will wave at passersby. Through mime and gesture it will try to communicate the knowledge you gave it. It understands questions, and will play charades.



# MORES OF THE PALE-FOLK

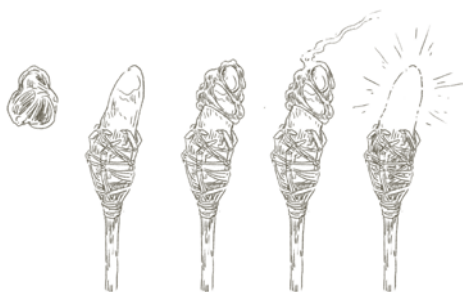


## SPEECH

Maintain physical contact with anybody you speak to;  
talk without touch is rude.

Songs are sung with linked arms. Greetings are made  
forehead-to-forehead. Far from home, in dangerous  
places, you'd put a hand on a friend's throat to feel their  
whispered reply.

Because words echo—and echoes bring bad things.



## LIGHT

Spirits of the sinkhole forests drink light  
and defecate fist-sized wads of resin.

Slather the resin on a mineral surface.  
Apply a spark. It is quickly consumed—  
but the surface it burned on is an  
incandescent crimson; warm as an  
open flame; will last six hours.

Resin is widely traded. The underworld  
is a land lit in shades of red.

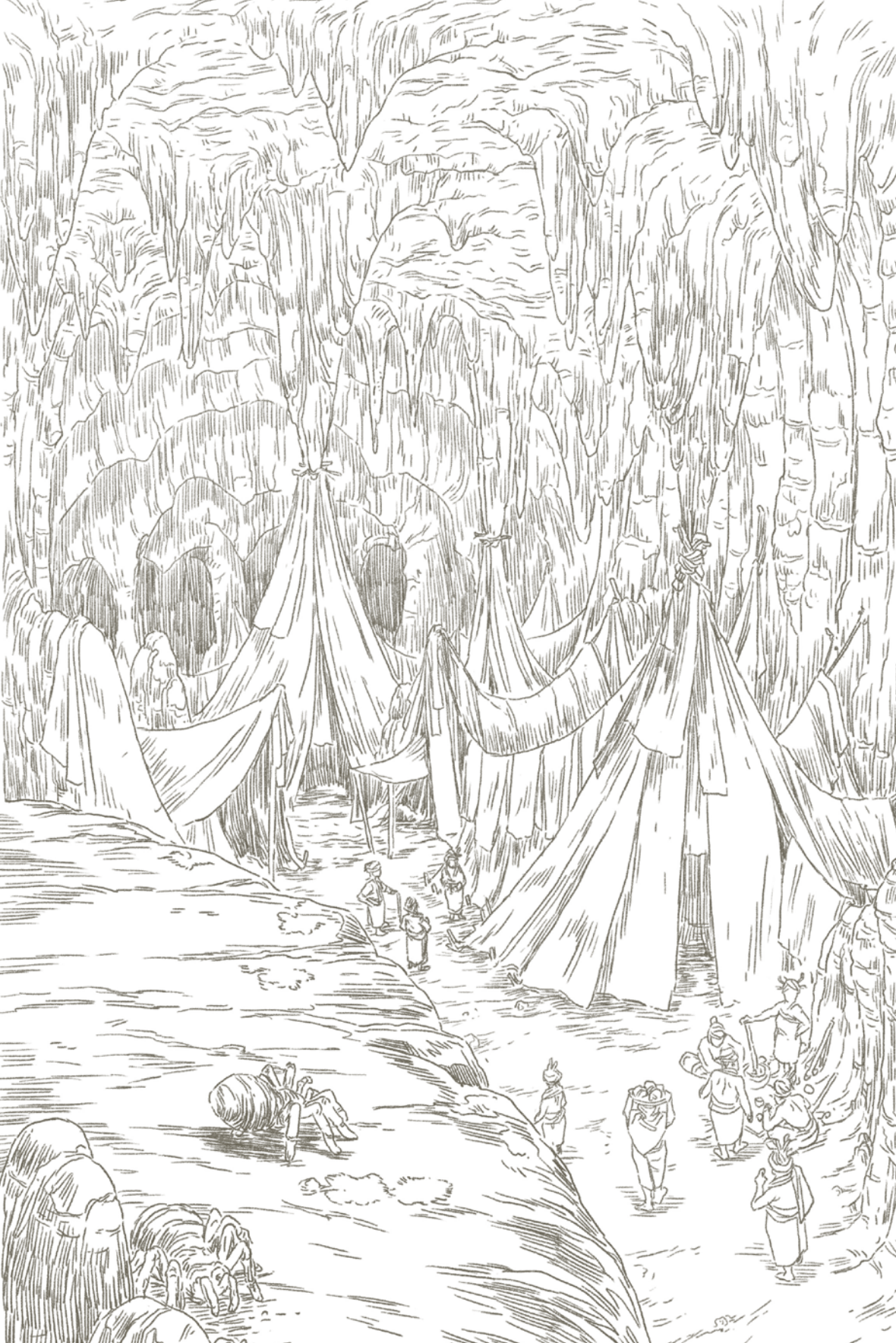
## TIME

Days mean nothing in this endless night.  
The pale-folk count time in torches.

Most are awake for a torch, then sleep for a torch.  
Starting a new torch signals time for a meal.  
A village syncs its resin lights—every six hours,  
all lights begin to die.

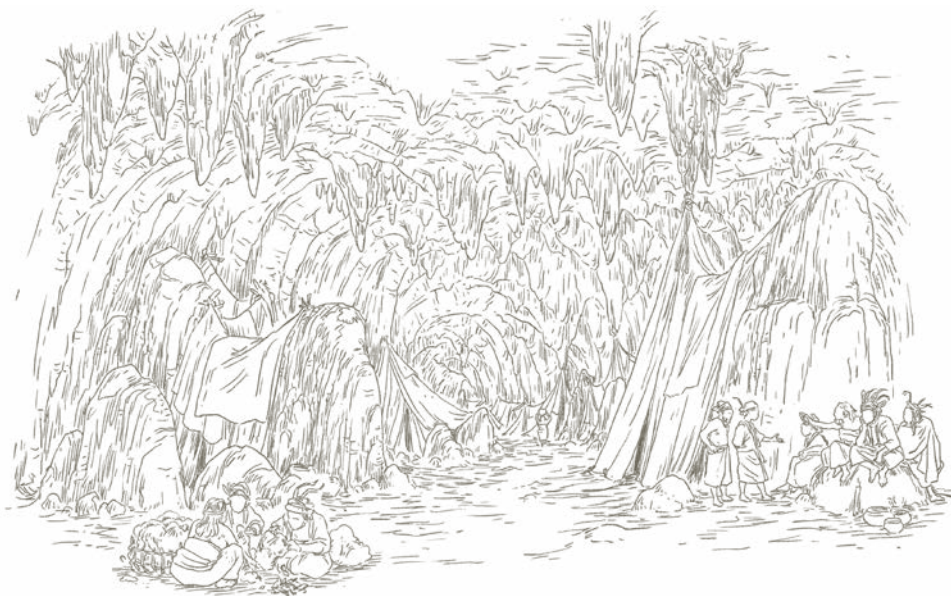
Reach out to somebody close, say a prayer to  
your ancestors, light new torches.







# BU-NI-ANG-KA, TYPICAL VILLAGE



The river below; the forest above; rootly  
narrows and arthropod nests a torch and a climb away.  
These are ways to Bu-Ni-Ang-Ka's wealth.

But also avenues for attack. Shrieking hexes  
and trip-drums are set in every tunnel.

## PALE-FOLK OF BU-NI-ANG-KA

A head shorter than daylanders, dark pupils in large eyes,  
white hair from birth. Hence “pale”.



This villager's touch feels:

1 Cold, as if stealing warmth.

4 Sweaty, immediately sticky.

2 Tentative, too shy to stay.

5 Firm, eager for approval.

3 Rough, from years of work.

6 Lingering, openly intrigued.

And has:

1 Chalk and charcoal smudges all over. A novice of the finger art. Their drawings only make simple, looped movements.

2 One hand lopped off, replaced with a hand-sized spider. Speaks with spiders. Do spiders respect her enough to listen?

3 A body of stone, waist down. His father was a stone person. He inherits the strengths and sensitivities of stalagmite-folk.

4 One eye gone. Bits of thigh missing. Scars. They were taken by roach soldiers. They were lucky to be found, rescued.

5 Luminescent root filaments instead of hair. She was touched by a sinkhole-forest spirit. Her root-hairs glow, even if cut.

6 A ragworm clinging to a bloody teat. A dilettante of the worm art. He coos to his pet, coaxes it to ooze psychoactive syrup.



Accessorised in insect legs and wings. And never without:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 Assorted chitin thorns and hooks. Crab traps. A fisherperson, skilled in river-craft. They steer dugouts, decorated with giant centipede parts. | 4 A set of axes, balanced for throwing. A hunter, skilled at tracking. Able to identify any flying insect species by the sound of its buzz alone.  |
| 2 A crook—salt pouch on one end, nectar glob on the other. A snailherd, skilled in slime-craft. Their flock is pastured two torches from town.    | 5 A pair of long sickles, used to cut cobwebs. A silk harvester, skilled at contortion. They always carry meaty offerings in case they get caught. |
| 3 A shield made of god scales, sewn together. A warrior, skilled in trap-craft. They rekindle dead lights, man battlements, mediate fights.       | 6 Assorted aromatic powders, in a head-mounted censer. A resin collector, skilled at climbing. The smoke makes spirits of the forest drowsy.       |

Preoccupied with:

- 1 An unusually stubborn injury. Neither snail balms nor shaman's unguents have worked. It begins to suppurate. A roach malady develops.
- 2 Nightmares. Shadows, stalking them through gossamer corridors. An apostate spider is nearby. Eats a sleeping mind every twelve hours.
- 3 A robbery. Cricket gangsters stripped them of belongings. Among the stolen items: a skull—their mother's. Will you help them get her back?
- 4 Absent siblings—sisters, out trailing a springtail herd, due home eight torches ago. Unlike the girls to be so late. Would you keep an ear out?
- 5 A lover. Who is wed to the village chief. They last trysted in the fungal meadows. That was careless. The village chief is allergic to spores.
- 6 Food. They have a particular hunger for daylander victuals—tastes not usually found underground. Do you have fruit? Fresh greens?



## ‘AH-KINKIN THE RUDE’ Village Chief

*Extraordinary. Hale. Ordering, finger arts, curse-craft.  
Crook. Finger necklace, chitin back.*

As abusive as a cup of coffee thrown at your face.

Touch-averse. People make excuses for him. His son was killed in the cricket heights, last year; now he is a different person, made only of spite.

Kinkin will fund raids against the crickets. He cares about their extermination more than his village's wellbeing. Secretly a roach infiltrator.

---



## ‘AH-SISHI THE FLEXIBLE’

### Worm Shaman

*Ordinary. Hale. Healing arts, worm-craft,  
mending. Acid spit. Ensorcelled crest.*


Voice as warm as a masseur's slippery kneadings.

Bu-Ni-Ang-Ka's principal shaman. They direct the forest foggings, interpret the divinatory dances, check up on the ill and recovering.

Sishi's earthworm oozes healing fluids for most ailments. But there is a new fever making the rounds, and it responds to no treatments.

---

## “GINGA” Wild Waif

 Ordinary. Frail. Sneaking, eavesdropping, spider-craft.  
Pebbles. Unprotected.

Annoying as a cat stealing a fish from your plate.

Too young for a deed-name, but desperate to earn one. Ginga the Fearless? Ginga the Bloody? Anything—anything but Ginga the Orphan!


She didn't want a foster-family. She does not need pity. She has skills to offer. Spiders love her. Take her with you? She will pull her weight.

---



## “AH-KUN THE SLOW”

### Bored Spinner

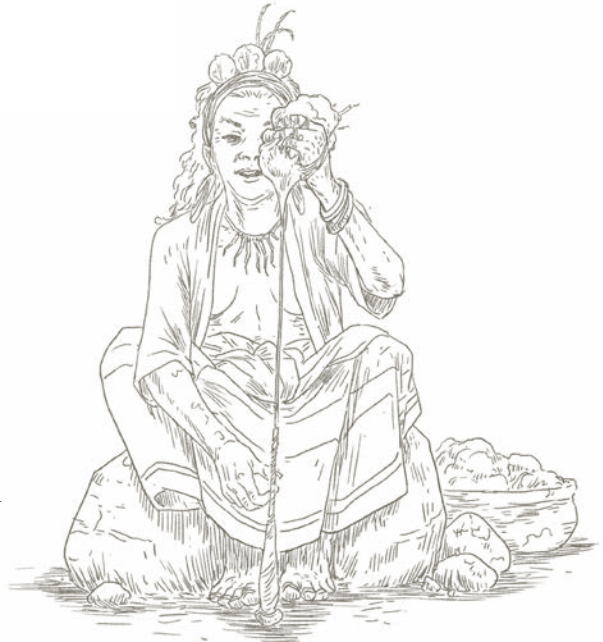
 Ordinary. Frail. Silk-craft, yarning,  
foraging. Dagger. Charmed bangle.

Babbles on like a pot of bean soup quietly boiling.

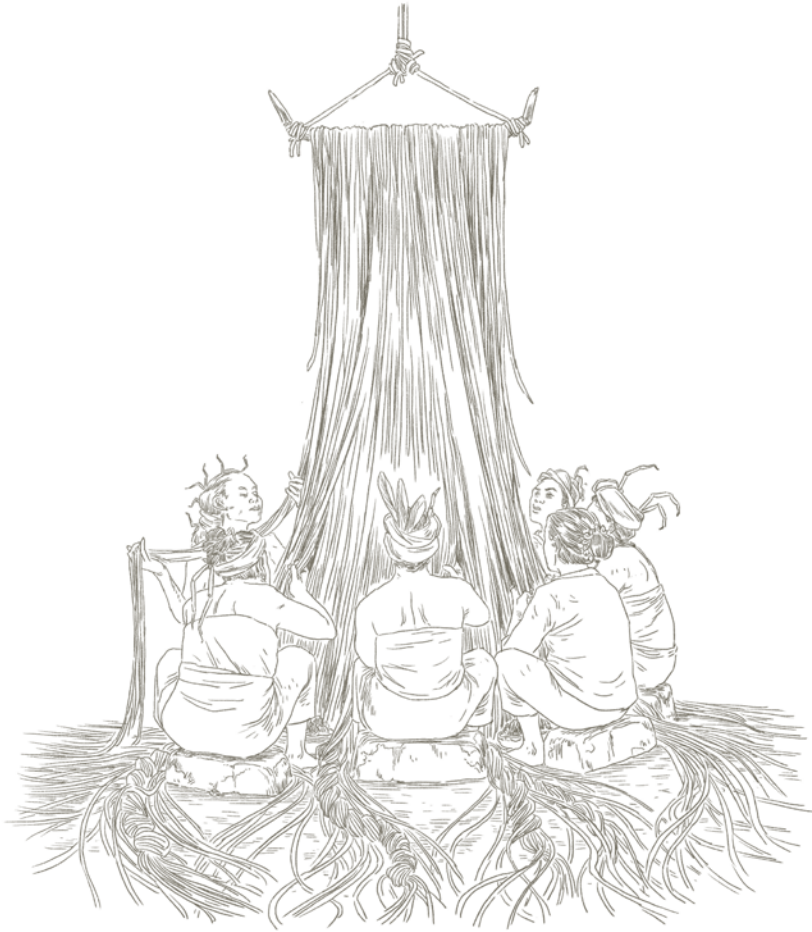
Sharp for a septuagenarian. Children listen while she spins, to learn their history; silk harvesters tap her shoulder, for luck.

Kun wants to leave. Her grand-daughters think she is too old for travel. So she will not ask permission. She wants to see a daylander city.

---



# WARES OF BU-NI-ANG-KA



Haggling is not just a verbal match but a physical wrestle:  
false camaraderie; assertive arms around shoulders;  
crushing handshakes.

The first to let go has given in. So pale-folk merchants  
build muscle, to do their job.

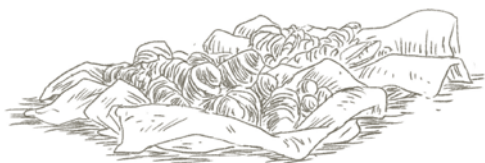




## SPIDER-SILK ROPE

Spiders express different silks for different purposes: for strength and mobility; for protective cocooning; for snaring prey.

This magic rope is braided from such varied silks. Touch it, tell it how you need it to be. Stiff and strong as steel? Light as gossamer? Sticky as bonding glue?



## SPRINGTAIL CANDY

The springtail migration brings their herds close to Bu-Ni-Ang-Ka's caverns; waiting hunters will bring in a season's worth of eggs.

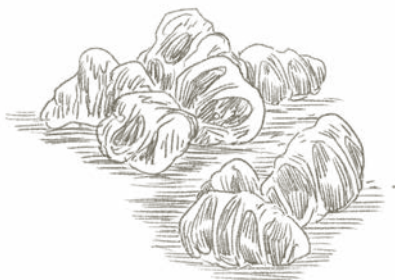
A springtail egg is a full meal. Pickled, it shrinks into a thumb-sized candy—but loses none of its nutritional value. Suck on one and be full for two torches.



## SNAIL LUBE

Giant snail slime, infused with feckroot and frill fungus, left to chill in a jar under the pound of a waterfall at least five persons tall.

The resulting ointment, applied from head to toe, renders your body as soft and pliable as a mollusc's. Squeeze through any crack!



## BLOT RESIN

Typically, resin dissolves when exposed to direct daylight. But sometimes the sun works his malice: instead of disappearing, a resin wad turns clear as ice.

Blot resin, when burnt, creates an anti-torch: a source of total darkness, obliterating all light within the radius of its un-shine.

# SINKHOLE FOREST OF BU-NI-ANG-KA



Sacred, fearful geography. Safest at dawn.  
Even then, shamans conduct fogging ceremonies,  
so as to smart the sun's eye.

Resin collectors comb the forest in that small  
window of morning darkness. They keep their heads down.  
They fear the spirits, asleep between the trees.



## FOREST SPIRIT

Powerful. Hale. Sleeping, smelling, entangling. Hug.  
Partial incorporeality.

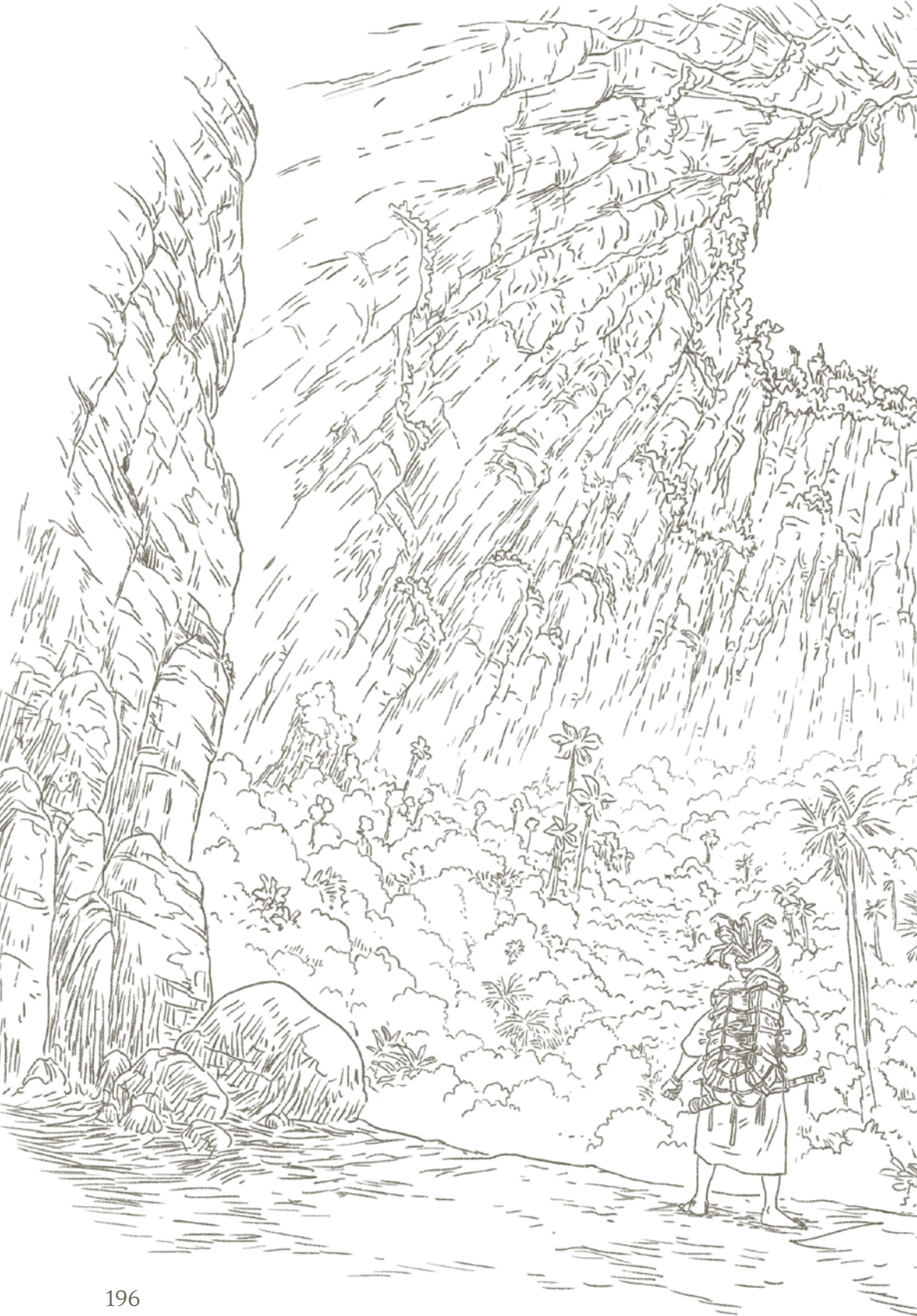
As bright as creation's biggest firefly butts.

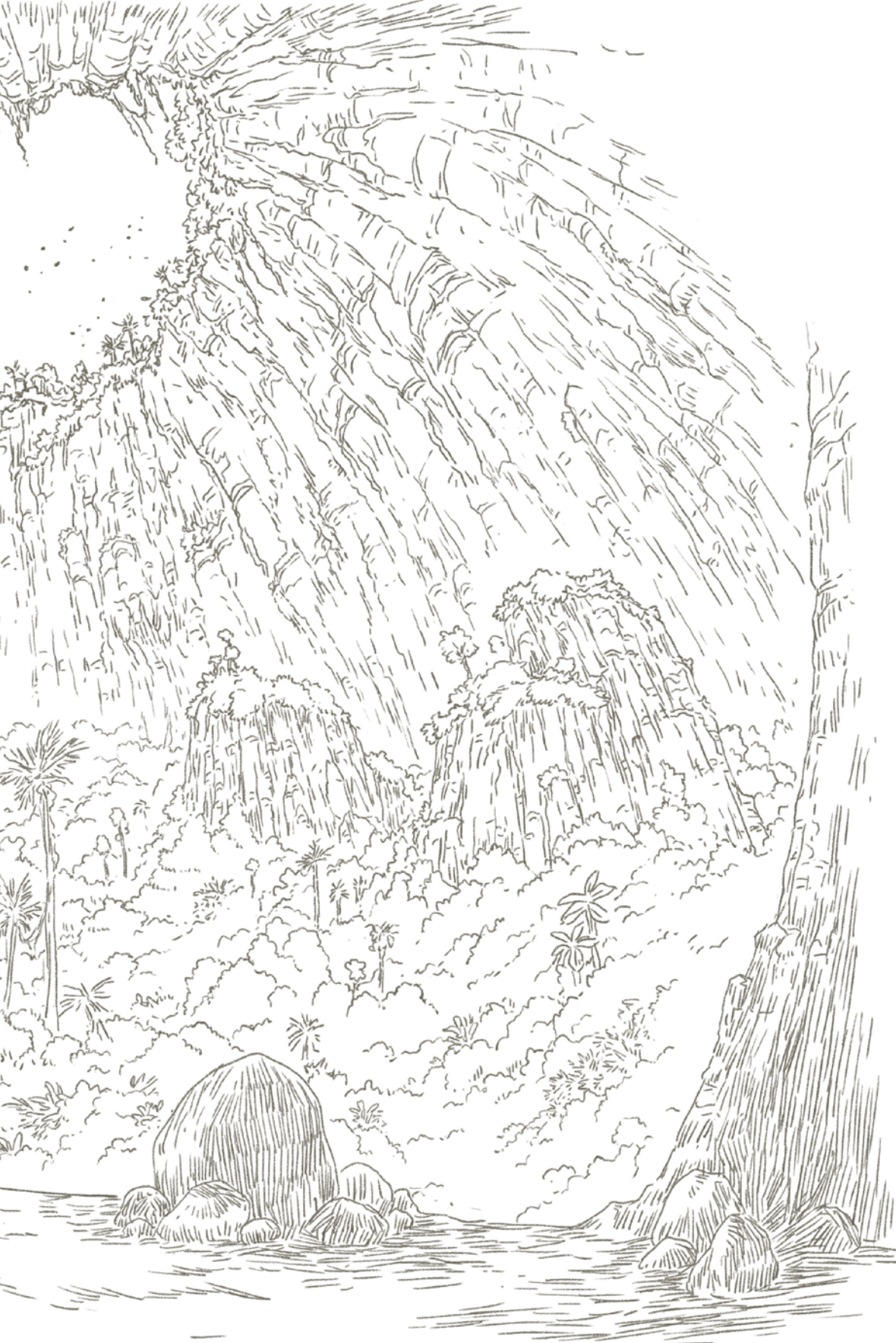
Groggy in smoke, active at night. They move like  
hardwood trees tottering, about to fall. They bend,  
bob their heads—sniff, sniff, sniff.

Attracted to flesh not local to their forest. In their arms  
you have orgasmic visions. After a minute: your hair  
glows. After six hours: your flesh glows.

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## AH-KINKIN'S SIGN HANDS

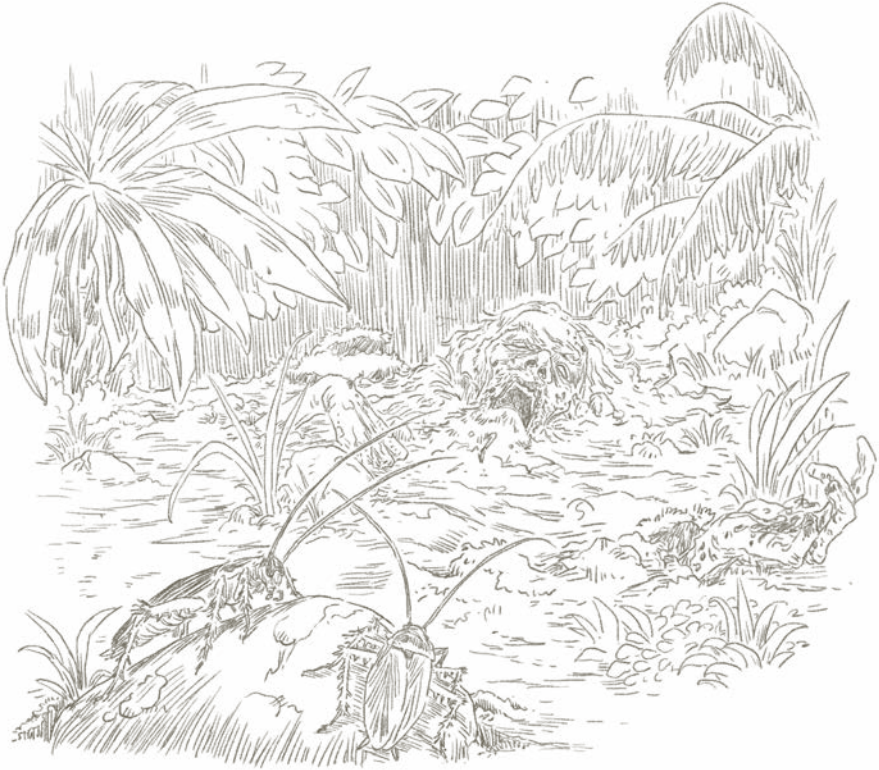


In the entrance tunnel to the sinkhole forest:  
two sign hands, vying for your attention.

The first warns you against roaches ahead.  
Numbers unknown, last seen around the waterfall's  
plunge pool. The second refutes the first; insists the  
roach, singular, has been dealt with.

Both hands have village chief Ah-Kinkin's  
unusually long fingers.

## AH-KINKIN'S GRAVE



By the pool of the forest's only waterfall:  
a forest spirit, crouching, gently pawing at a patch  
of stained boulders and turned earth.

Haphazardly buried here: the corpse of Ah-Kinkin,  
raggedly dismembered. His clothes and crook  
and tongue are missing.



CHAPTER 5

# BLIND ELEPHANT



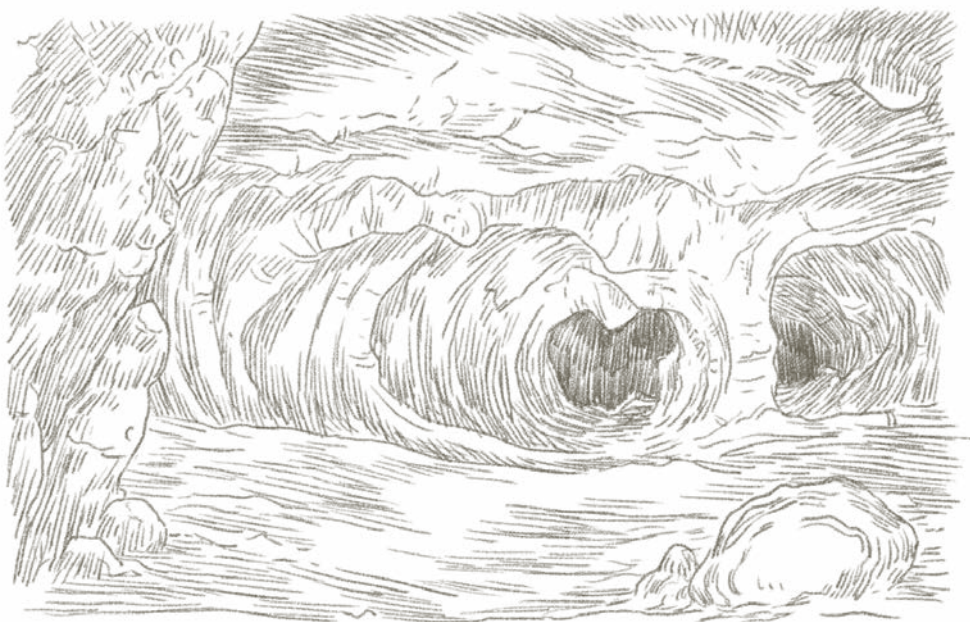
A Dripstone Family And  
Its Dysfunction







# “IT’S SIX TORCHES FROM THE MARKET MEET.”



“I’ll take you,” the stalagmite-woman says.  
When she reaches for your hand she misses the first time.  
“Your torch is so bright!”



## “NŌDEY” Daylander Enthusiast

*Extraordinary. Frail. Reciting, navigating, sword arts.  
Daylander sword. Stone torso, voluminous cargo.*

Keeps touching your hair without permission. “So pretty!”

Noodey plies stalagmite-folk territory, telling lurid tales about the surface world, using her collection of daylander tchotchkes as props.

“I’m not like my siblings. I love daylanders. You people are so raw. So real!” You’re a great prop—a living one. She will talk you up, tell bold lies about you.

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# A PARABLE FOR LITTLE SISTERS

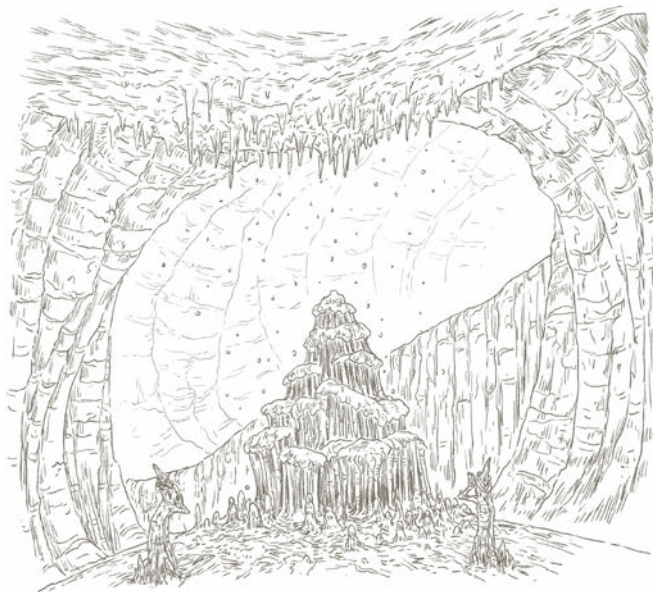


When she is young Mother Water  
dances in the void above.

There she trysts with cosmic beings,  
learning how to love. The fruit of such  
couplings are first attempts: unfinished  
souls; meat creatures; fibrous plants.  
A trial-run reality, like your old love's  
clumsiest pawings.

When she is older Mother Water flows  
down into the world.

Here she meets spirits of stone, whom  
she takes as husbands. The fruit of these  
marriages are fuller formed: complete  
persons; limestone animals; crystal  
growths. A lasting world, like your new  
love's firm embrace.

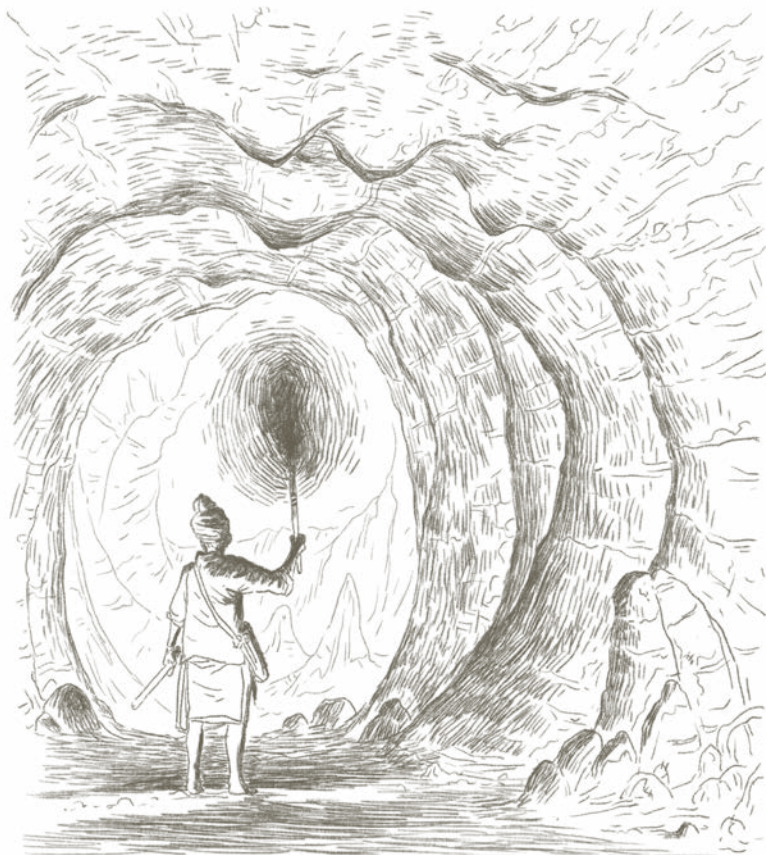


Praise our stone father,  
he lends us with full and sturdy substance;

Praise our Mother Water,  
she shapes us with her surges and seepings;

Praise our father and Mother,  
they teach us that good things are done best  
with repeated practice.

# QUALITIES OF THE STALAGMITE-FOLK

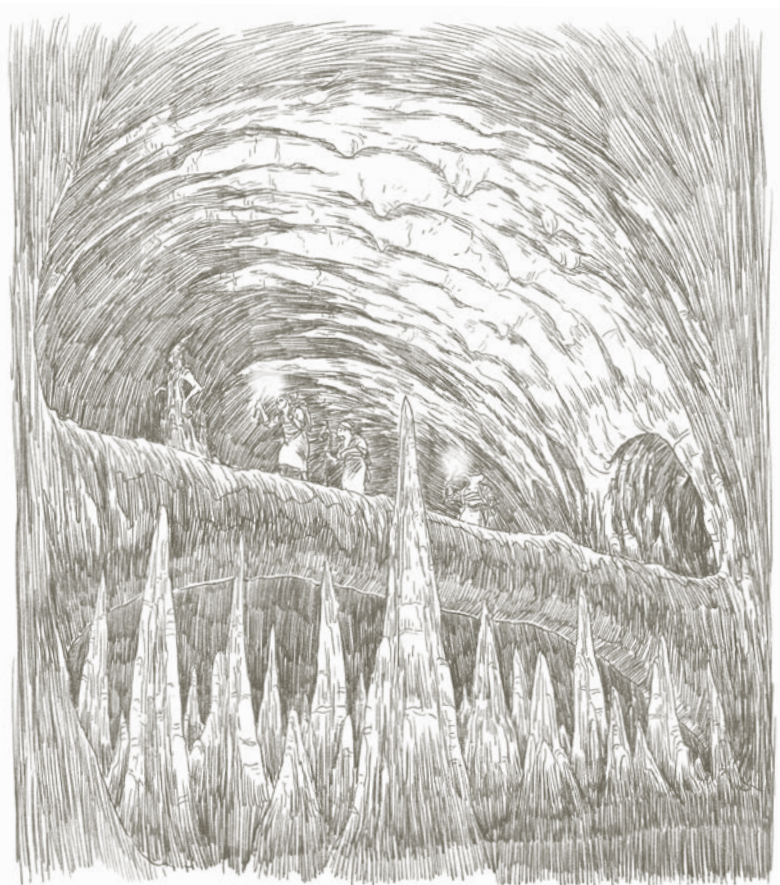


## FACULTIES

They slide across any mineral surface like ice on a floor. They climb walls this way. They try not to hang from ceilings, though. It's uncouth.

Gem eyes read the dark like your liquid eyes read light. They see in negative: to them an unlit cave is perfectly visible; whereas a torch spews blackness that blots all sight.





## FOOD

They are what they eat. Quartz makes them sprout crystals; copper crackers give them metal skin; vitriol cocktails are aphrodisiacs, and make them pliable.

Used to strong flavours, they find flesh-people foods disappointingly bland. A fish broth is nothing, compared to a serving of molten salt.

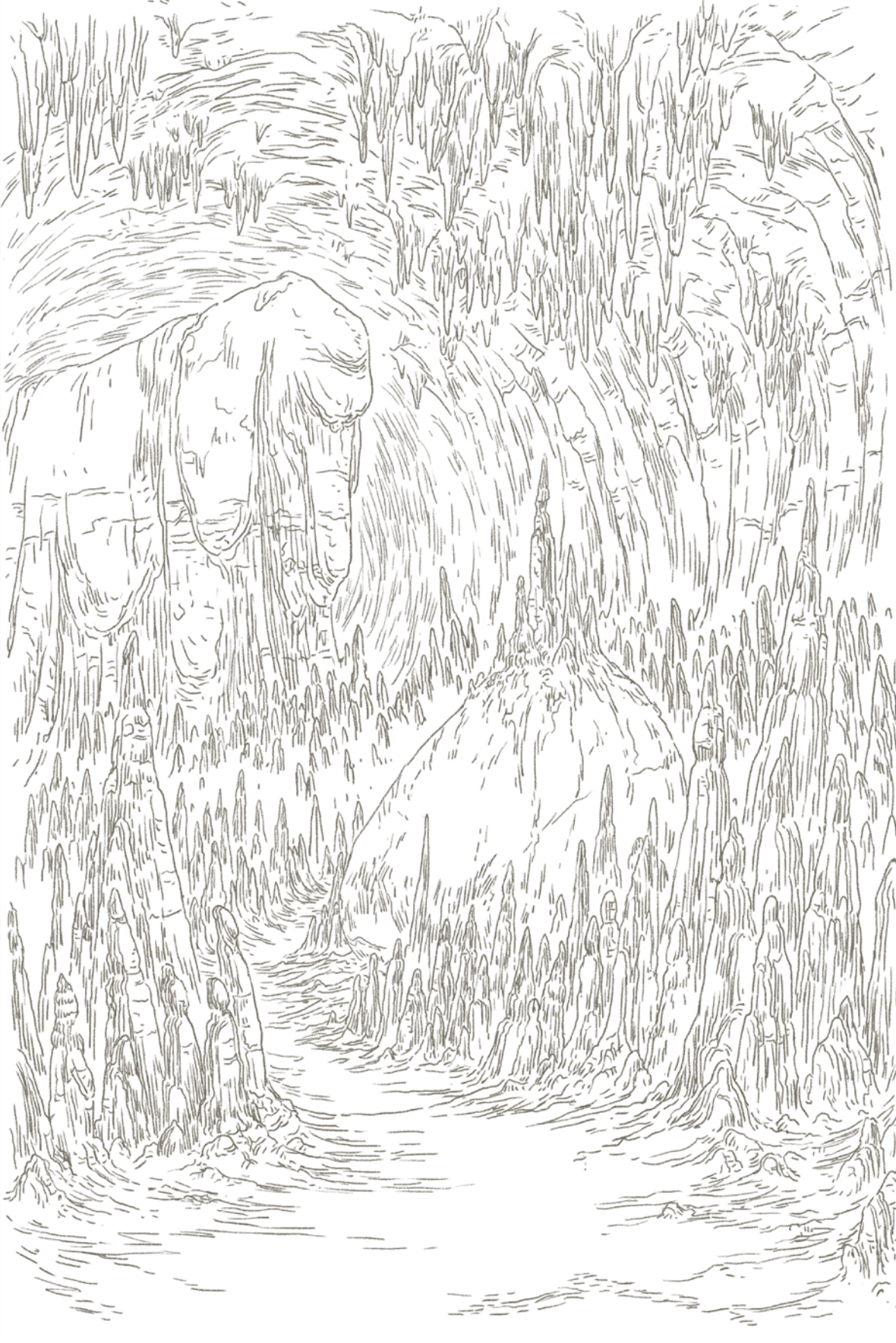
## FAMILY

All people are Mother Water's children. Stalagmite-folk are organised into families: sibling sets, raised in the same creche, born from the same stone father.

If a stone father is roused to leave, or if Mother Water stops dripping? Their marriage is over, that creche is dead, its children are orphans.







# CRECHE-HALL OF IBIS EGG

Ibis Egg is a stone father. Noodey is one of his daughters. She makes a trip home every season.

This season she finds her family halls full of visitors. "What's going on? It's not festival time. Hey!" The visitors don't reply. They don't even look her in the eye.

In the creche, seeing the shape that looms over her stone father, Noodey understands why. "Oh, no!" she says.



## “BLIND ELEPHANT”

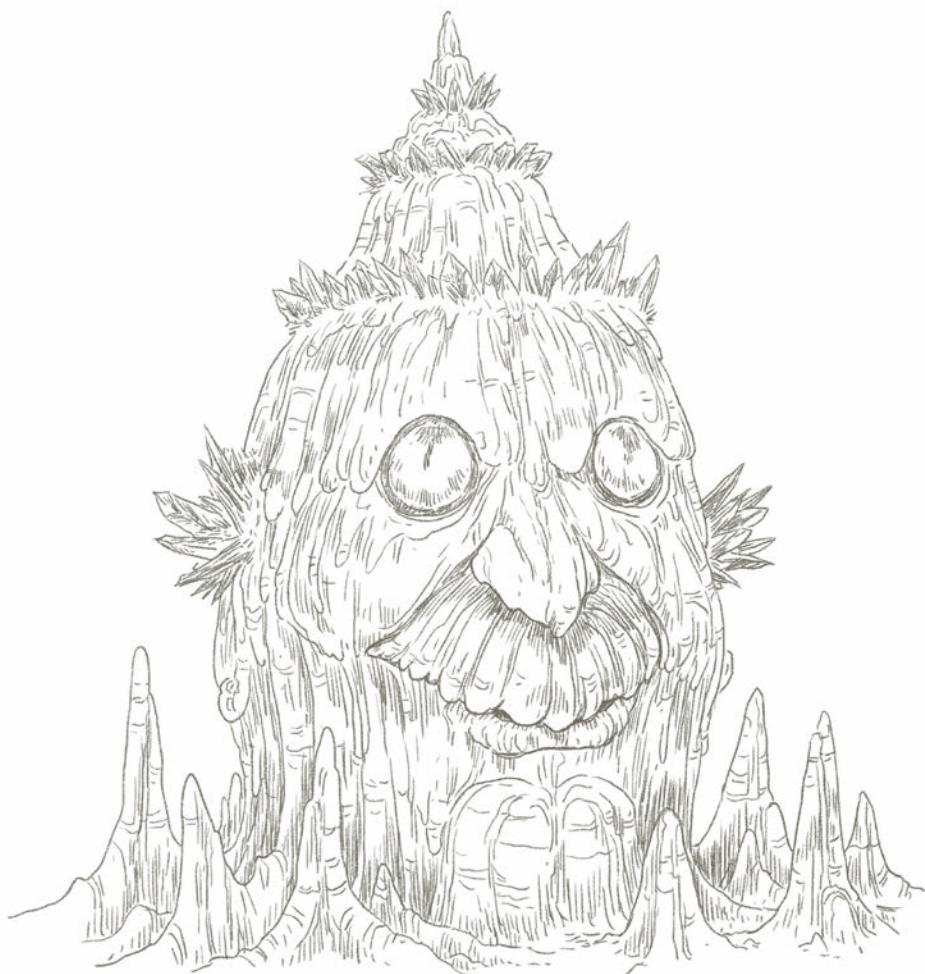
### Divorcee Father

*Powerful. Hale. Tunnelling,  
mourning, brooding. Inexorable bulk.  
Stone skin, stone flank, stone back.*

If an earthquake could sound bitter  
it'd sound like him.

He woke to find his marriage over, his  
love usurped, diverted, his Mother Water  
dry. Distraught, he fled. He tunnelled  
with no direction. He breached Ibis  
Egg's creche.

Here he has stayed, since. Watching his happily-  
married host—and fuming. Envy rises in him.  
His love was stolen. Why shouldn't he steal  
another's?



## “NŌN VINLŌ” Egg Elder

*Extraordinary. Frail. Sleeping, listening, song-craft.  
Magic lullaby. Stone forehead, stone jowls.*

The gentle voice of a nun, guiding your meditation.

The eldest living sibling of her family, Vindoo hasn't left its creche-hall in over a decade. She has forgotten how to move about.

Knows of Blind Elephant's jealousy. She sings to him, soothes him. But he sleeps so fitfully. He starts awake every hour, now. Soon her singing will not matter.

---



# BLIND ELEPHANT, REFUGEE FAMILY



Maybe they've met flesh-people before. Or heard stories about daylanders. The novelty that you are distracts them from their troubles.



They know you to be:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 Sightless, underground. They keep trying to sneak up and startle you.     | 4 Fascinatingly disgusting. "So you cry from your crotch? Can we see?"      |
| 2 Wild and murderous. He treats you like he would a dangerous animal.       | 5 Inferior in every way. She will speak over you, and never let you finish. |
| 3 Exotic specimens. "Your hair is so pretty! Can I touch it? Wow, stringy!" | 6 Poor, malnourished. They keep trying to feed you stalagmite-folk foods.   |

They have:

- 1 A peridot afro so big it messes with their balance. They indulge in too much olivine candy.
- 2 Shoulders sprouting jagged carbuncle spikes. The new pyrope supplements are working.
- 3 Corrosive breath. They have lava-folk friends, and love the taste of their acid-rich cuisine.
- 4 Painful joints. Every move, they grind like a rusty hinge. They drink too many bug slurries.
- 5 Rusty skin, streaks at a touch. They bulked up on iron ore, but have stopped working out.
- 6 A glowing body, searing hot. Torch resin is a narcotic to stalagmite-folk. They're an addict.



They travelled with few belongings. Including:

- 1 A pet—a rock-porcupine. Will sniff out and try to steal metal objects, to chew on as snacks.
- 2 A club of ensorcelled citrine. Any spot it impacts transforms and shatters into yellow jewels.
- 3 A set of vials, filled with condiment powders. Any would lacerate your lungs, if breathed in.
- 4 A set of finely carved wooden serving platters. Easily scratched. Utterly impervious to heat.
- 5 A sword of witch salt. The first flesh creature it touches immediately mummifies. It shatters.
- 6 An unfinished younger sister they'd been sculpting. Without parents she will never be born.



Back in their own halls they made their living:

- 1 At a crystal farm. They can show you a clear path through the fields. Their family is known for fist-sized amethyst grapes and extra-sharp salt lilies.
- 2 As a glassmith. Their workshops were hells of fire and unbreathable fume. They made toy figurines so fine these come alive at their command.
- 3 Angling moonfish. The best fishing spots are always in the loneliest caverns; they could lead you down shortcuts or detours known to nobody else.
- 4 Practising the gut art. Using their stomachs as chemistry labs, they'd guzzle ingredients, and regurgitate potions. They kept stores of rare materials.
- 5 In a crude-oil mine. A nasty business. That liquid demon-stuff harbours all manner of perilous horrors. They are scarred, and trained in fighting arts.
- 6 At the creche. Not everybody in a family is interested in caring for younger siblings. Their creche-hall is full of nooks, to play hide-and-seek in.

Few will admit to you the terror they are all feeling.  
They blindly followed their stone father in his retreat.  
Without a home, with a wrecked family—  
who are they, really?



## “OYYO” Elephant Invert

Extraordinary. Frail. Hanging, mimicking, fishing.  
Spidersilk net. Stone head.

Uses words only in an impression of somebody else.

On the ceiling, she feels close to Mother Water. Her family disagrees. They call her: “Pervert!” “Incomplete.” “You’re basically a fleshling!”

Her old family is mean. But she misses home. And the new family that lives there now—those people make her afraid.



## “YISOOLEY” Elephant Artist

*Extraordinary. Frail. Crystal-craft, remembering,  
insulting. Ruby scalpel. Stone hair, stone arms.*

As effortlessly grandiose as a lifted pinkie finger.

Hand to forehead, he weeps for the masterworks he has  
been forced to abandon: a gold statue of the hero Noosoo;  
a moonwhale of flawless tourmaline.

Nobody cares for art. In his desperation, Yisooley turns  
to you. Will you follow him to the halls of Blind Elephant,  
help him save priceless treasures?

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# TOOLS OF THE STALAGMITE-FOLK



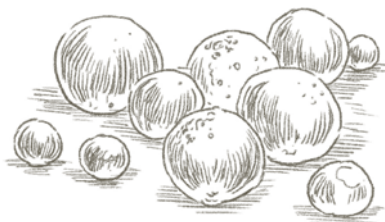
Noodley shows you wares she knows you will find useful.  
“Let’s trade” she says, sly. She wants something personal of  
yours, something with a story she can embellish.



## CROCKODILE EYE

The first and most essential item Noodey brings you. “Eat these,” she says. “It’ll help you see like us. You won’t need torches!”

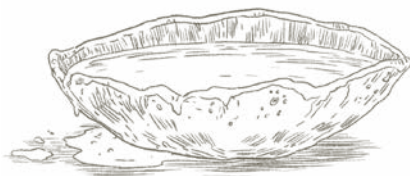
Any rock-creature’s eyes will do. Effect lasts twenty-four hours. You could grind them down, wear them like glasses—those have no time limit.



## MONK PEARL

Ever-monks often find their minds becoming full—too much wisdom, too many memories. They expel old thoughts to make new ones.

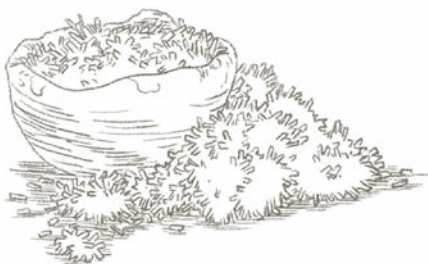
Monk pearls sold tend to contain: knowledge of safe paths; skill at a particular trade; sensations of sex with a rare beast. Grind it, snort it, gain the memory.



## MOTHER’S RUB

Viscous, distilled from a creche’s seepings, sorcerously transformed by a gut-art practitioner. Massaged into skin.

It makes your body malleable. Resculptable. Change your face, your build, your gender! Fair warning: stalagmite-folk sculptors are not used to working flesh.



## ICE RICE

Grown in pools fertilised by cold-spirit spoor. Served raw. Its frozen texture contrasts with the heat of most stalagmite-folk dishes.

Left exposed it takes a year to fully melt. Flesh-and-blood bellies can’t digest ice rice—but a source of preternatural chill has many uses.



# MONKS OF THE STALAGMITE-FOLK

Stalagmite-folk rarely bother with spiritual refinement. After all: they are Mother Water's most perfect children, in her most perfect creation.

Ever-monks practice an irony, a spiritual stunting—an over-attachment to the physical world. They refuse to leave it. They tonsure their heads, severing

themselves from Mother Water's cycle of life and death.

Refusing to die, they will outlive their siblings and families. So they tend to wander. In stories they are sages, do-gooders, perverts.

## “GŌNDŌN”

Ever-monk Adventurer

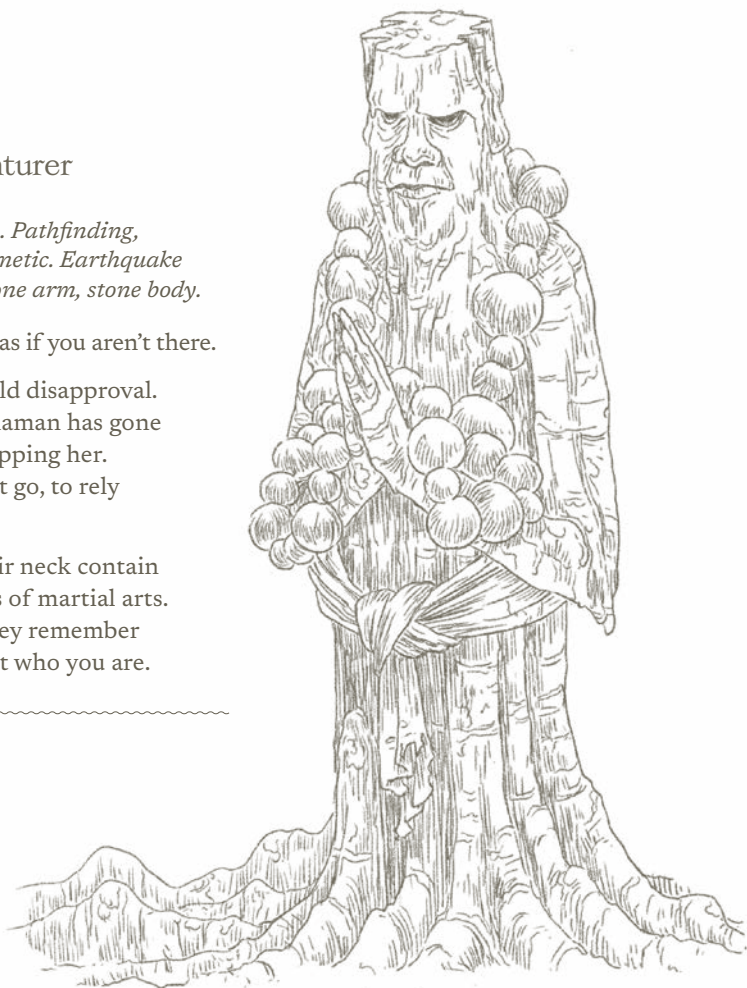
Extraordinary. Hale. Pathfinding, language arts, arithmetic. Earthquake palm. Stone pate, stone arm, stone body.

A running monologue, as if you aren't there.

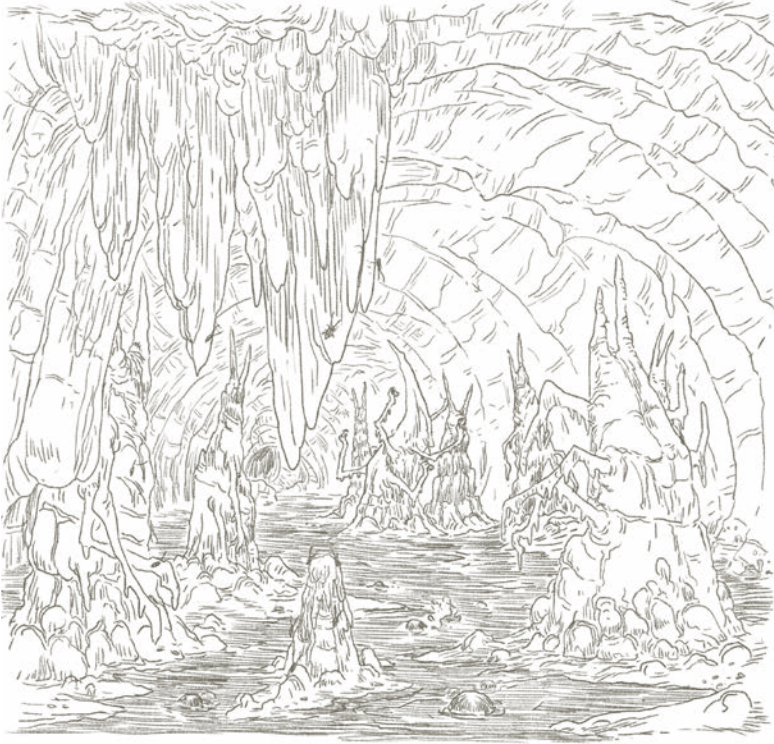
They view you with bald disapproval. “The Blind Elephant shaman has gone wrong. I need help stopping her. But oh, how low I must go, to rely on fleshlings!”

The pearls around their neck contain Goondoan's memories of martial arts. If they swallow one they remember how to fight, but forget who you are.

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# CRECHE-HALL OF BLIND ELEPHANT

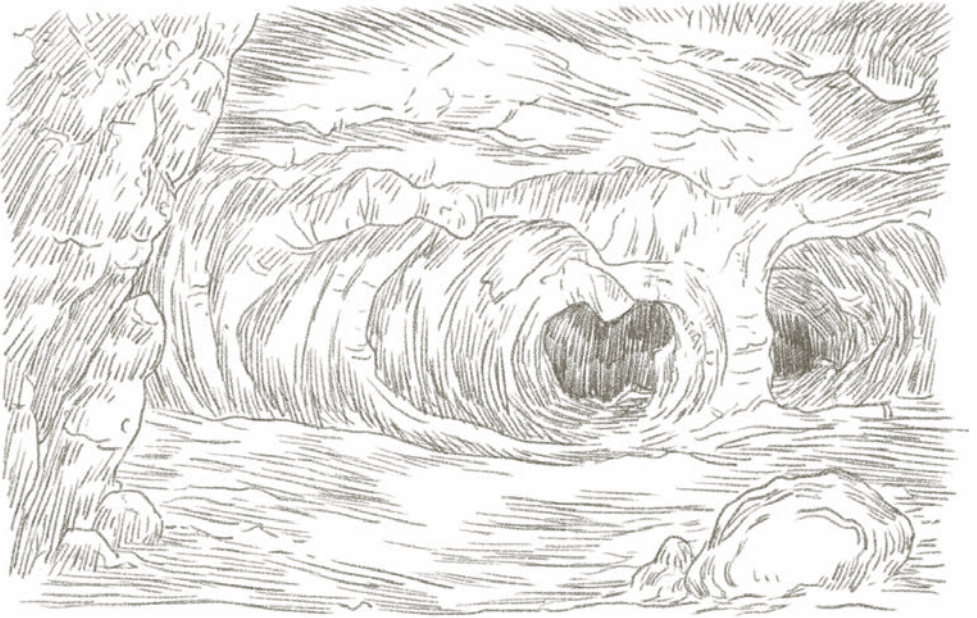


The heart of a family's cavern complex. With its stone  
father and unborn stalagmites absent, Blind Elephant's  
creche should be empty—

But it isn't. It bustles with the chitter of roach soldiers.  
They are erecting barricades; expressing bile into  
rimstone terraces; frolicking and mating.

The stalactites from which Mother Water once  
dripped are dry, crusted with brown gunk.

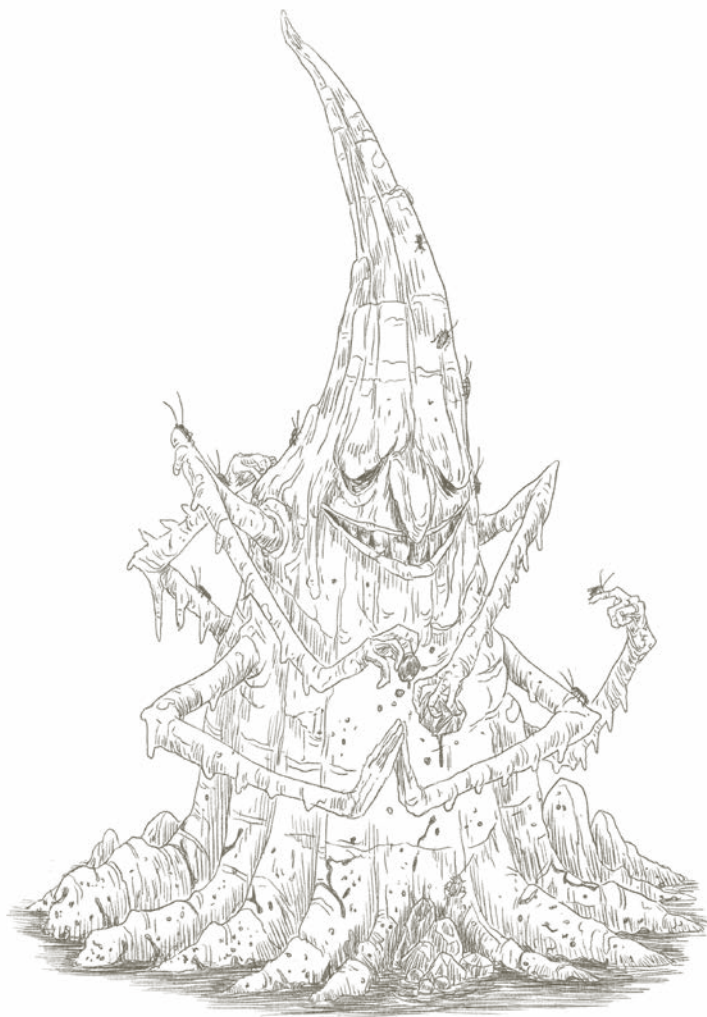
# WOMB-CHAMBER OF SWEET OTHECA



It feels wrong to be here, in Mother Water's catchment,  
above the creche. Like fingering your parent's privates.

That Oontrey would enter this place, much less plug  
it with filth? Unthinkable madness! Yet here she is:  
sculpting new stalagmites from the sewage.

The children she makes are twin-horned,  
and have too many arms.



## “NŌN ŌNTREY” Ootheca Elder

*Extraordinary. Frail. Crooning, sculpting, gut arts.*  
*Flesh To Limestone. Stone skin, stone nose, chitin body.*

Moves in stops and starts, as if poorly puppeted.

She was once elder of Blind Elephant. Some time ago she swallowed a roach. It crawled into her head, and whispered. She shouldn't have listened.

She stole Mother Water's love. She stole it for her new stone father—called Sweet Ootheca, or Odoyoq. If you crack her skin there is chitin underneath.





CHAPTER 6

THE GOD  
ODOYOQ

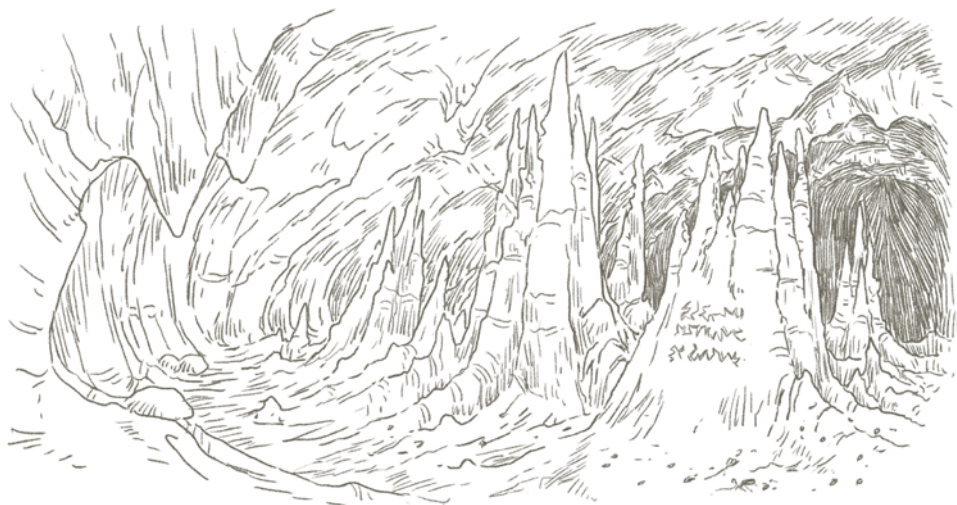


And His Million  
Fractious Children





# IN EVERY CAVE, FURTHER THAN YOU WANT TO GO



Written in cricket indent or  
stalagmite glow-ink or pale sign-hand, a liturgy:

“Ođoyoq, skin of milk  
Brighter than a star  
Ođoyoq, skin of glass  
Brighter than all stars  
Ođoyoq, skin of our skin  
Bright our only star.”

## AN ENCOUNTER WITH ROACHES

They are many, in myriad shapes; their strong musk  
betrays them most of the time.

Close to nests, passages are acrawl—roaches, roaches  
roaches; they want to sneak into packs; spoil supplies.



Also:

- |  |                         |  |
|--|-------------------------|--|
| 1 A breeze like morning<br>breath, spore-laden,<br>causing you sneezing fits   | 1 Attending to          | 1 An enormous pile of<br>droppings, none fresh,<br>now shaggy with mould.      |
| 2 A squad of six roach<br>soldiers, each bearing a<br>different chitin weapon  | 2 Cavorting with        | 2 A faecal pilgrim, wet<br>cough, lugging a sack of<br>roach-made doodads.     |
| 3 A detachment of twelve<br>Apahu peacekeepers,<br>never not in formation      | 3 Failing to avoid      | 3 A half-dozen roach<br>spectres, squealing, who've<br>already noticed you.    |
| 4 A trio of Kunhekaq<br>cavaliers, doting on their<br>faithful chasm centipede | 4 About to fall on      | 4 A gaggle of twelve flesh<br>hosts, slow as sloths and<br>absolutely silent.  |
| 5 A pair of chitin wizards,<br>picking samples, unable<br>to agree on anything | 5 Almost done<br>with   | 5 A gang of six Ippodo<br>marines, stumbling over<br>their ill-matched limbs.  |
| 6 Pa Yaapiq, a boiling comet<br>of roaches, whose drone<br>deafens all else    | 6 Swiftly<br>abandoning | 6 A roach ogre, loose of its<br>restraints, earth-shaking,<br>always starving. |





# THE RULE OF ALL ROACHES

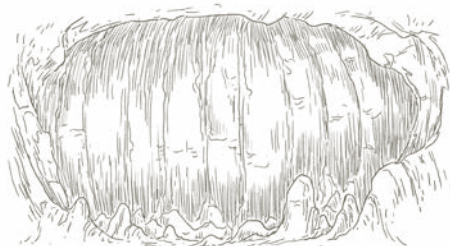
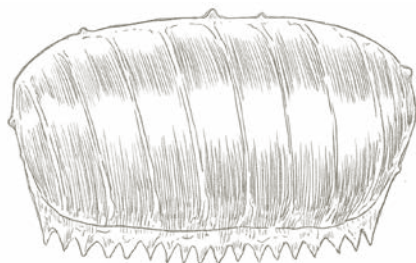


## ODOYOQ'S INHERITANCE

The gods were family. As all siblings do, they quarrelled: they killed, and were wounded, and they died too. The voids of their rotting bodies formed the world.

Odoyoq was lowest of all gods. But he was subtlest, and wiliest—only he survived, at the last. All spaces that were once his siblings are his, by right.

Praise Odoyoq, enduring!



## ODOYOQ'S INHERITORS

Having seduced his siblings Odoyoq laid a single ootheca.

From this holy vessel hatch the queens and kings of all roach-kind.

The queens quarrel and kill; the kings are wounded and die. They do as siblings must.

Yet more always hatch from Odoyoq's ootheca. Thus is roach-dom renewed.

Praise Odoyoq, inexhaustible!

## ODOYOQ'S PEOPLE

Pa Ulupu, Questioning King, was first to identify the castes of Odoyoq's children. This order remains true, through ages and upheavals:

- ☞ Monarchs rule and make war;
- ☞ Wizards invent and plot feuds;
- ☞ Knights feast and battle to die;
- ☞ Priests teach and must punish;
- ☞ Soldiers serve and cannot rest;
- ☞ Captives slave and are eaten.

Praise Odoyoq, unchanging!

## ROACH SOLDIERS

*Ordinary. Frail. Spear-craft, flying, foraging.  
Chitin spear. Chitin back.*

As tall and as cruel as children get, when raised in cruelty.

“Are you tasty? Where’d you get that shield? Mine now!” As chatty as children—and as filthy: injuries they cause have a 2-in-6 chance of passing on a roach malady.

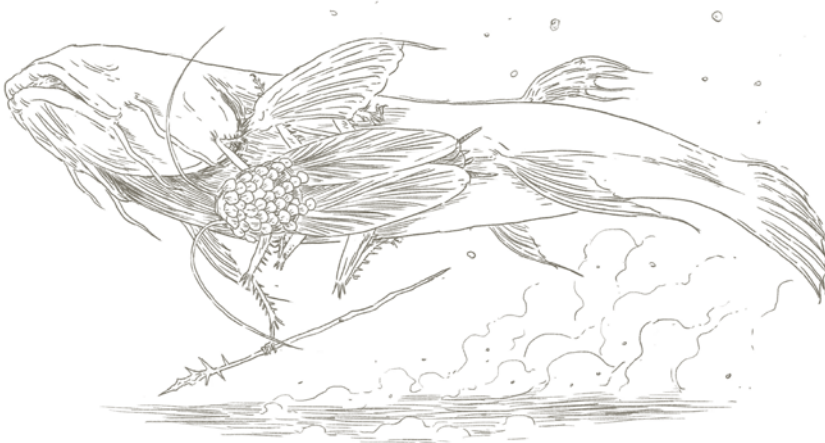
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Roach soldiers born into Ma Apahu’s army are peacekeepers. They bear iron spears and shields. They are drilled to fight in phalanxes.



Roach soldiers born into Pa Ippodo’s army are marines. They have fish scales, or frog legs. Trained to swim poorly, and cling to large fish.



## ROACH PRIESTS

*Ordinary. Hale. Ritual-craft, scolding, scrawling. Chitin staff. Charmed pendant.*

Roaches have replaced the flesh of their faces; they speak in a buzz of wings.

Non-roach persons who've heeded Odoyoq's call. Priests possess a convert's fervour; they use their old skills to extol their new god.

---



This one was a:

- 1 Daylander merchant. This nest has direct access to the surface. Pens full of daylander captives. Most are roach infiltrators.
  - 2 Pale-folk worm shaman. This nest is rife with pet ribbon worms, large as pythons, with branched, venomous proboscides.
  - 3 Pale-folk hunter. This nest is riddled with deadly traps—tar pits; spikes; explosives—to test the faithful and destroy unbelievers.
  - 4 Angelhair-worm maybe-man. Multi-limbed, eager to add more; they train their congregation in the art of clean dismemberments.
  - 5 Stalagmite-folk gut-artist. Their slimy hands sculpt living matter like clay. They will twist limbs; erase ears and mouths and nostrils.
  - 6 Bat-folk hermit. Spells: Close Wounds; Control Water; Puncture Sclera; Control Hair. May cast each once every twelve hours.
-

## ROACH KNIGHTS

*Extraordinary. Hale. Mace arts, armour-craft, taunting. Chitin club. Shell shield, milk-iron cuirass, shell gauntlet.*

Stands tall as your shoulder.  
Bangs their shield, laughing,  
like a riot cop.

Soldiers who steal enough  
armour to cover themselves head to  
hind-claw become knights. They  
remain knights so long as this  
armour isn't stolen off them.

Successful knights are profit-  
minded bullies. Injuries they cause  
have a 1-in-6 chance of passing  
on a roach malady.

---



Roach knights that rise from Ma Kunhekaq's army are cavaliers. They wear centipede-shell armour. They are deft riders of monstrous beasts.

## CHITIN WIZARDS

*Extraordinary. Frail. Chitin-craft, arguing, lying. Acid-spitting wand. Charmed wings, charmed bracers.*

Oversized tegmina like convocation robes. Worse than any um-actually guy you know.

They rear and advise monarchs. All lower castes obey them. Yet they are insecure, as all in power are. Other wizards are rivals to sabotage, or lord over.

---



This one seeks an advantage in:

- 1 Strength. They sip a nectar globule. They now punch with the force of a roach ogre. Lasts an hour. Supply of three doses.
  - 2 Swarms. They shout a spell. All roach soldiers in earshot manifest a twin from their shadow. Once every twelve hours.
  - 3 Sickness. They breathe a lac-coloured cloud. Fatal to non-roach insects; causes a roach malady in fleshy creatures.
  - 4 Surreptitiousness. They sink onto a surface as a two-dimensional shadow. In this state, only magic harms them. At will.
  - 5 Subterfuge. They swallow a piece of you. All who catch their scent now mistake them for you. Lasts twenty-four hours.
  - 6 Sacredness. They grab one of your limbs. Its bones turn to chitin. Its flesh sloughs. Now you have useless roach limb.
-



# ROACH MALADIES

Odoyoq's eldest sisters were felled by disease.  
Disease has been a potent tool for his children ever since.

You are showing symptoms:

- 1 Eggs. The site of your wound swells. A roach swarm emerges twelve hours later.
- 2 Twitchy bowels. When you defecate, you pass jar-shaped droppings. Incurable.
- 3 Brain worms. Lose a random sense for twelve hours. Recurs every twelve hours.
- 4 Fever. Lasts twelve hours. Now the stink of your sweat sexually attracts roaches.
- 5 Vomiting. Lasts twelve hours. Now good food is disgusting, and rotting food tasty.
- 6 Hives. An infuriating itch whenever a roach spots or smells you. You must scratch.

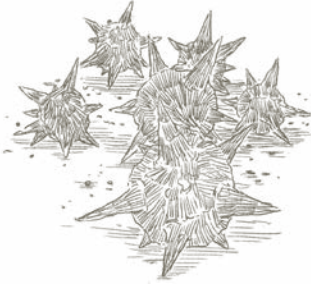


Effective treatment requires a clean environment in a non-roach settlement.

Catch three roach maladies? Reality itself begins to see you as a child of Odoyoq—you obey wizards and monarchs; magic that works on roaches will work on you.

# ROACH DODADS

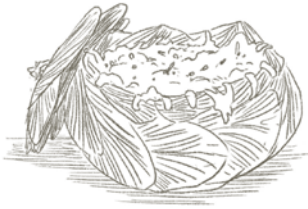
It is a culture built around pilfering other's stuff;  
it has few exports. Most of these come from faecal pilgrims,  
paying for passage into the daylands.



## OGRE MINES

Roach-ogre turds resemble caltrops the size of birthday cakes. Crack a fresh one open: nutritious syrup, will attract vermin.

Week-old turds have brittle shells; fermented, pressurised syrup. A footstep causes it to explode—a room-sized glue trap. You'll need help to get unstuck.



## ROYAL CHEESE

The ejecta of Pa Yaapiq's passage can be collected, crushed into paste, and curdled. This is the result: a sharp, crunchy cheese.

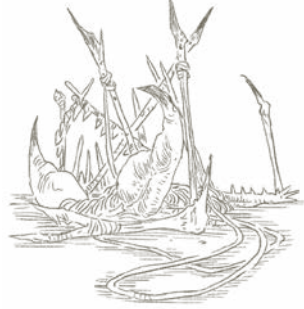
Cures infertility, causes lost limbs to regrow. Also lends you the aroma of royalty, for twelve hours: Odoyoq's children fear and obey you.



## INSTANT-SOLDIER EGGS

Thirteen hatch. They grow to full size in twenty-four hours. They never develop wings, and remain albino-shelled. They die after a week.

They imprint on the first person they see, mimicking their manner and morals. But they will always obey a chitin wizard's words.



## STING WANDS

Living weapons, made from captive parts. Those with grafted mouths can be fed rations, to replenish their uses.

Acid-spitting nasus: melts flesh and metal; eighteen uses. Nerve needle: target obeys you; one use. Web wand: spits a spiderweb net; six uses.



## FAECAL PILGRIMS

☞ *Ordinary. Frail. Spitting, smelling, gossiping. Spore cough.*  
☞ *Mould-toughened flesh.*

The earthy must of dried-out manure. They hack and spit, hawk and spit.

When the god Odoyoq remembers his lost love he has a belly ache, and shits out his regret as a pellet. This pellet grows limbs and feelers.

A faecal pilgrim is always seeking the night sky, and a star whose shape they cannot remember. If they hear the name “Elalela” they crumble to dust.

---

# THE RULERS OF ALL ROACHES

Kings and queens are generally found in the second nest generated under their control.

There is no concerted war between siblings—  
but a lot of quarrelling over nests; no-show  
allies; theft and violence.

## “MA MASALAQ” Changing Queen

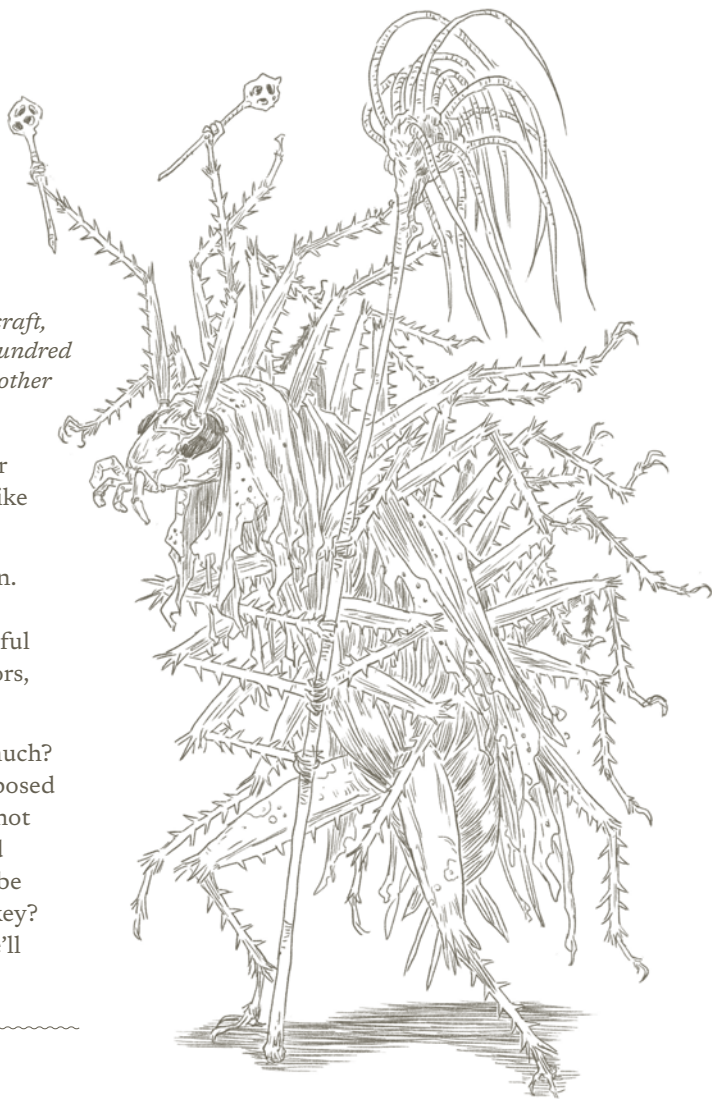
*Powerful. Hale. Chitin-craft,  
pain arts, anatomy. A hundred  
hands. Another arm, another  
arm, another arm.*

Mutter mutter mutter, her  
mouth-palps drumming like  
impatient fingers.


A rebel against convention.  
Responsible for many of  
roach-dom’s most successful  
innovations: the infiltrators,  
the ogres.

Maybe she dabbled too much?  
The flesh plague was supposed  
to strengthen her brood, not  
break it. She has searched  
her world for a cure. Maybe  
daylander gods hold the key?  
Bring her their blood; she’ll  
drink and see.

---



## FLESH HOST

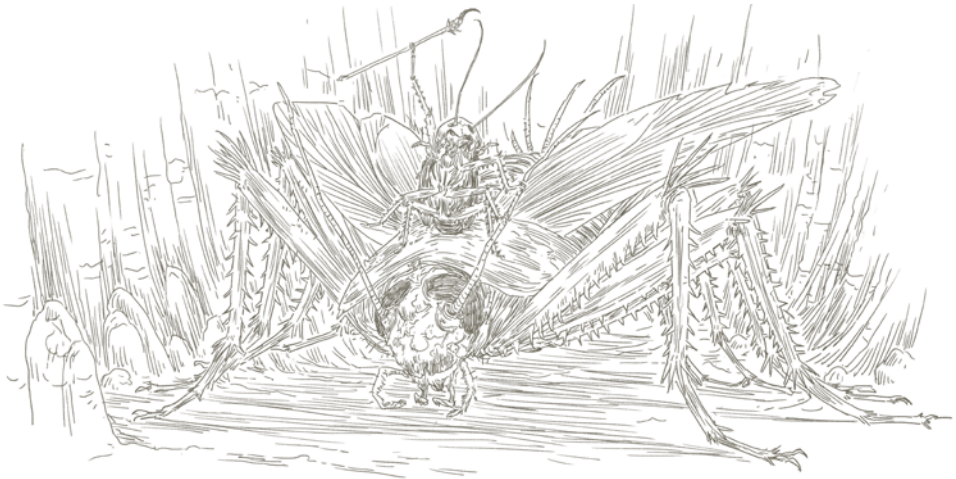
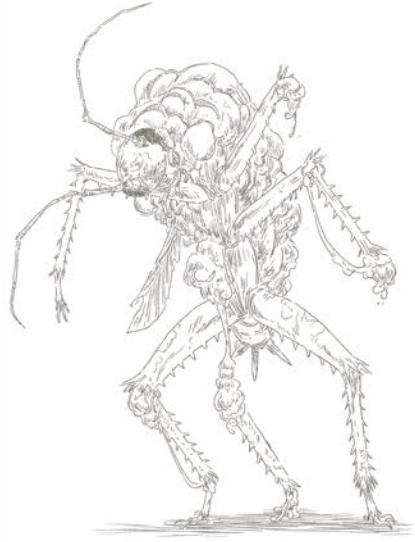
 *Ordinary. Hale. Shambling, hiding, menacing. Lashing limb. Tumorous back, tumorous belly.*

Legs bending the wrong way, head tilted too far. And not a word.

Soldiers in Ma Masalaq's army are susceptible—erupting into a mass of tumours, without rhyme or reason. Slower than you. Flightless.

But tough and strong and synchronised, in a way the uninfected rarely are. Will act to corner non-roach creatures.

---



## ROACH OGRE

 *Extraordinary. Hale. Trampling, gobbling, forgetting. Spiny forelegs. Impenetrable shell, large bulk.*

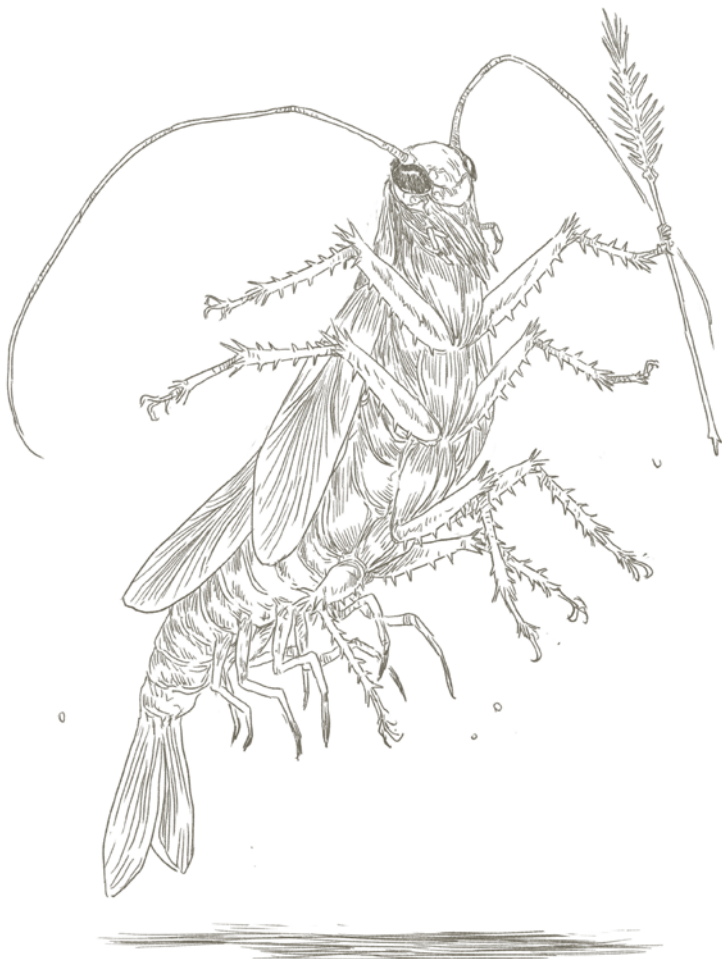
A dust-shaking stomp, a roar of nonsense-syllables.

Roach ogres are created through sorcery: a soldier's mind is made simple, and their body made monstrous, impervious to normal blades.

Flightless. Always distracted by food—unless ridden by cavaliers.

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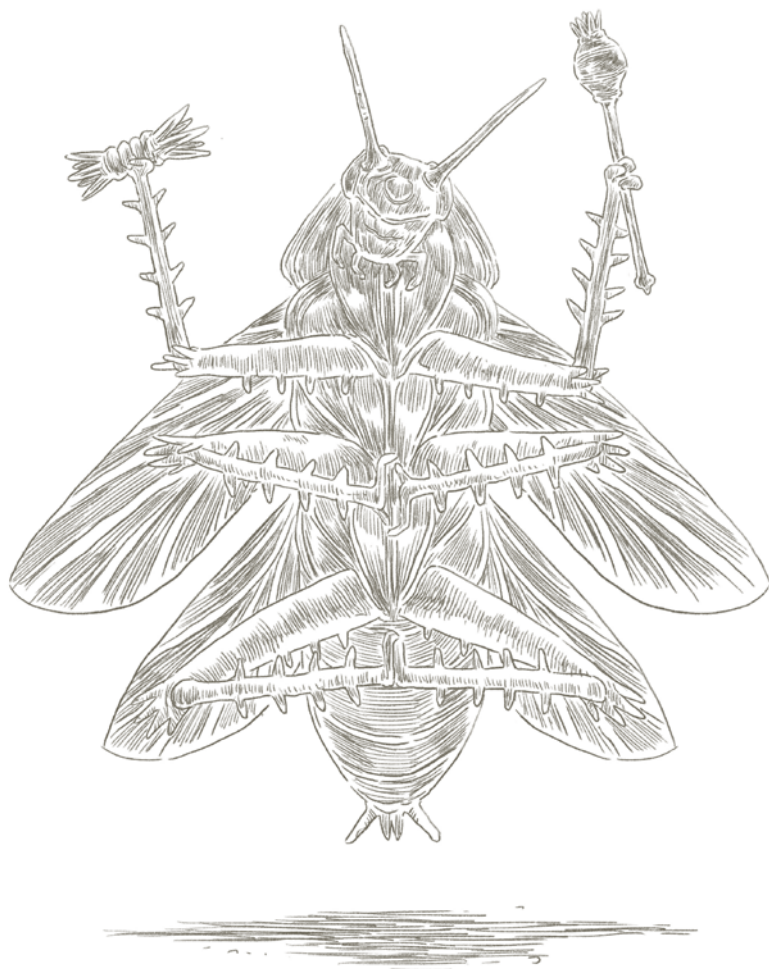
## “PA IPPODO” Grasping King

*Powerful. Hale. Bragging, dance arts, lovemaking. Fishbone scepter. Chitin back, chitin tail.*

The grace of your fanciest girlboss wearing a mermaid swim-tail.

A rebel against propriety. Defies gravity, treading air as if it were water. Embraces zoophilia: any creature he ogles finds him irresistible.

Questions the fundamental axiom that water is inimical to roach-kind. His children already tame and ride cave carp. Pa Ippodo wants to romance a saltwater creature. Imagine a marine with a dolphin’s flipper, or crocodile scales?



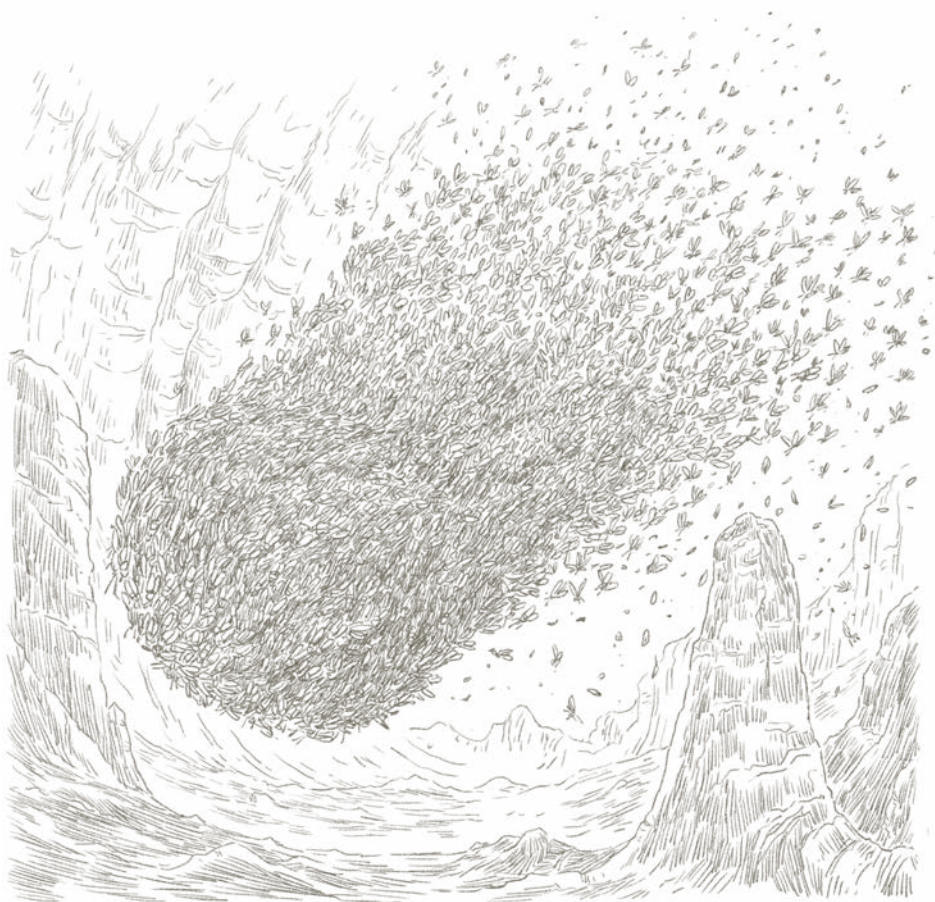
## “MA APAHU” Ruling Queen

*Powerful. Hale. Philosophising, hand arts, metallurgy.  
Iron sceptre. Iron arms, iron tegmina, iron ass.*

A reek like the rusty gate to an empty home. A serene idol, floating.

A rebel against disorder. She crawled into a crucible and was hatched again in a cast-iron body. Anything that touches her turns to iron, too.

Ma Apahu speaks without speaking. She values peace, she says. Her peacemakers will aid you. They will help you fight off cricket bandits. They will guard your burrows. They will not leave. They keep peace, now.



## “PA YAAPIQ” Raging King

*Powerful. Hale. Deafening, digging, devouring. Weight of a thousand roaches. Thousands, tens of thousands, millions.*

Rolling thunder that does not end. It is louder, nearer.  
Take cover.

A rebel against reason. Pa Yaapiq is a living storm: flying, hatching, mating, biting, dying roaches. They make no demands, hold no demesnes.

They do not listen. They may be lured. Any creatures they catch in the open they scour to bone bits. If harmed, swarms of them may shear away—forming gestalts of their own: separate personhoods.

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## “MA KUNHEKAQ” Campaigning Queen

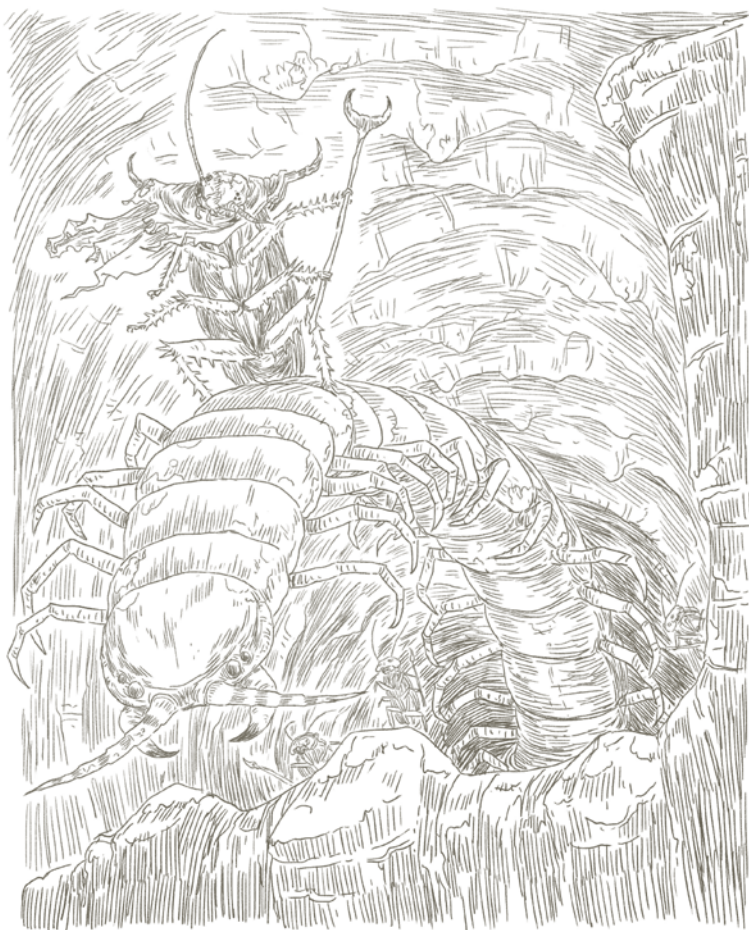
*Powerful. Hale. War arts, strategising, inspiring. Bident of agony. Ghost-flesh cloak, centipede-shell vest, charmed ring.*

The fist-shaking, cackling grandiosity of a cartoon supervillain.

A rebel against inaction. A strike from her bident causes a full-body cramp. But worse is the bisecting force of her centipede steed.

Ma Kunhekaq slew the chasm spirit Mishuk, grafting half his head to her own. Thus were the centipedes enslaved. Now she seeks to conquer spider-kind—formidable foes. Bring her good recon, and she will reward you.





## CHASM CENTIPEDE

✎ *Extraordinary. Hale. Encircling, digging, biting. Paralytic venom. Shell plates, parrying tail.*

Blurred movement—a landscape of shell, of spikes—blurred movement.

They were a great people. All feared them, once. Now they are born in captivity, conditioned to take roach riders, fight roach wars.

They are loved. Like a warlord loves his chained leopards.  
That is a species of respect, maybe.

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# A GOD WITHIN THE WORLD



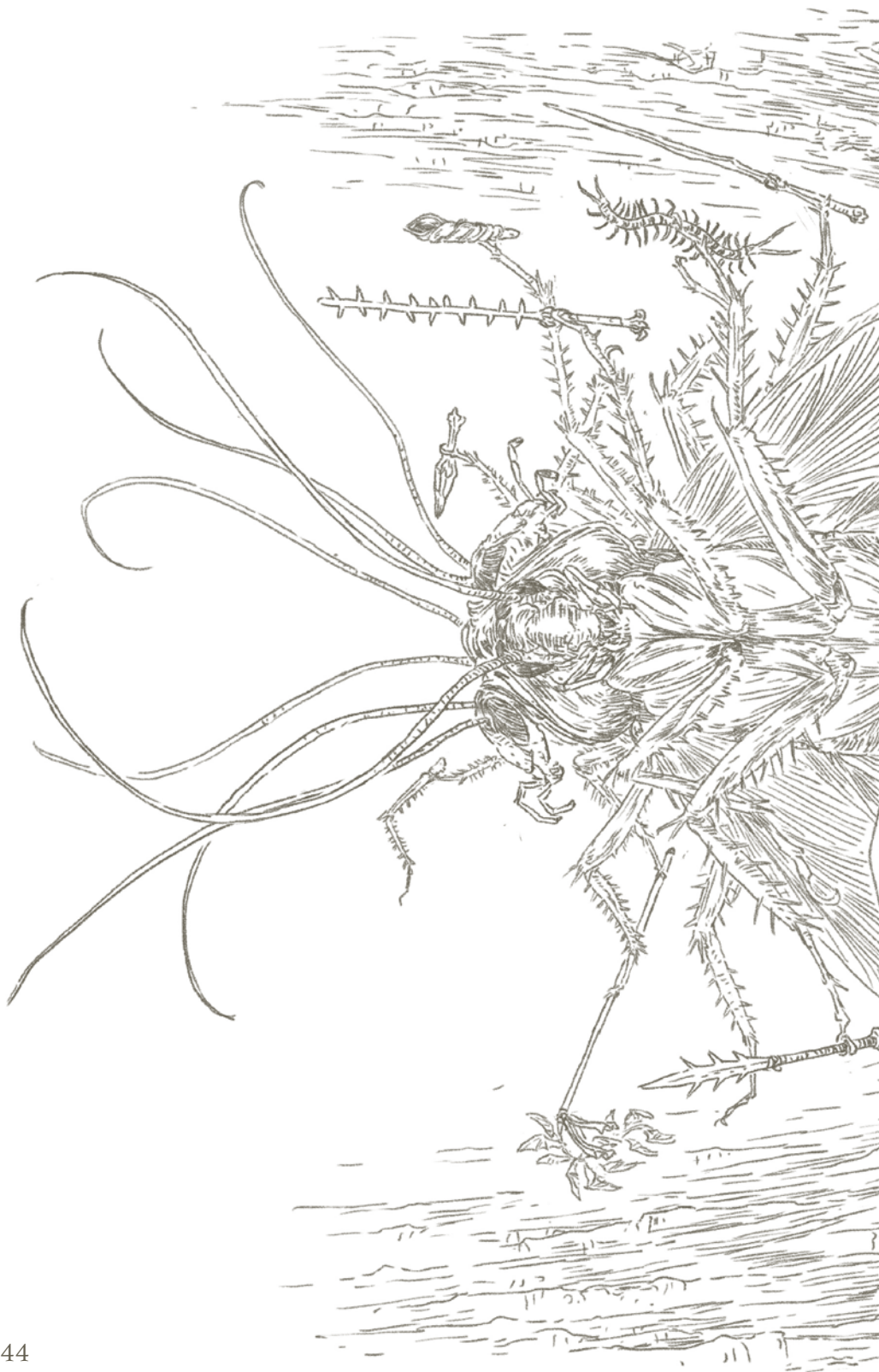
When a roach monarch declares you their sworn enemy,  
you draw the antennae of their father. Replace Pa Yaapiq  
in the encounter table with Odoyoq.

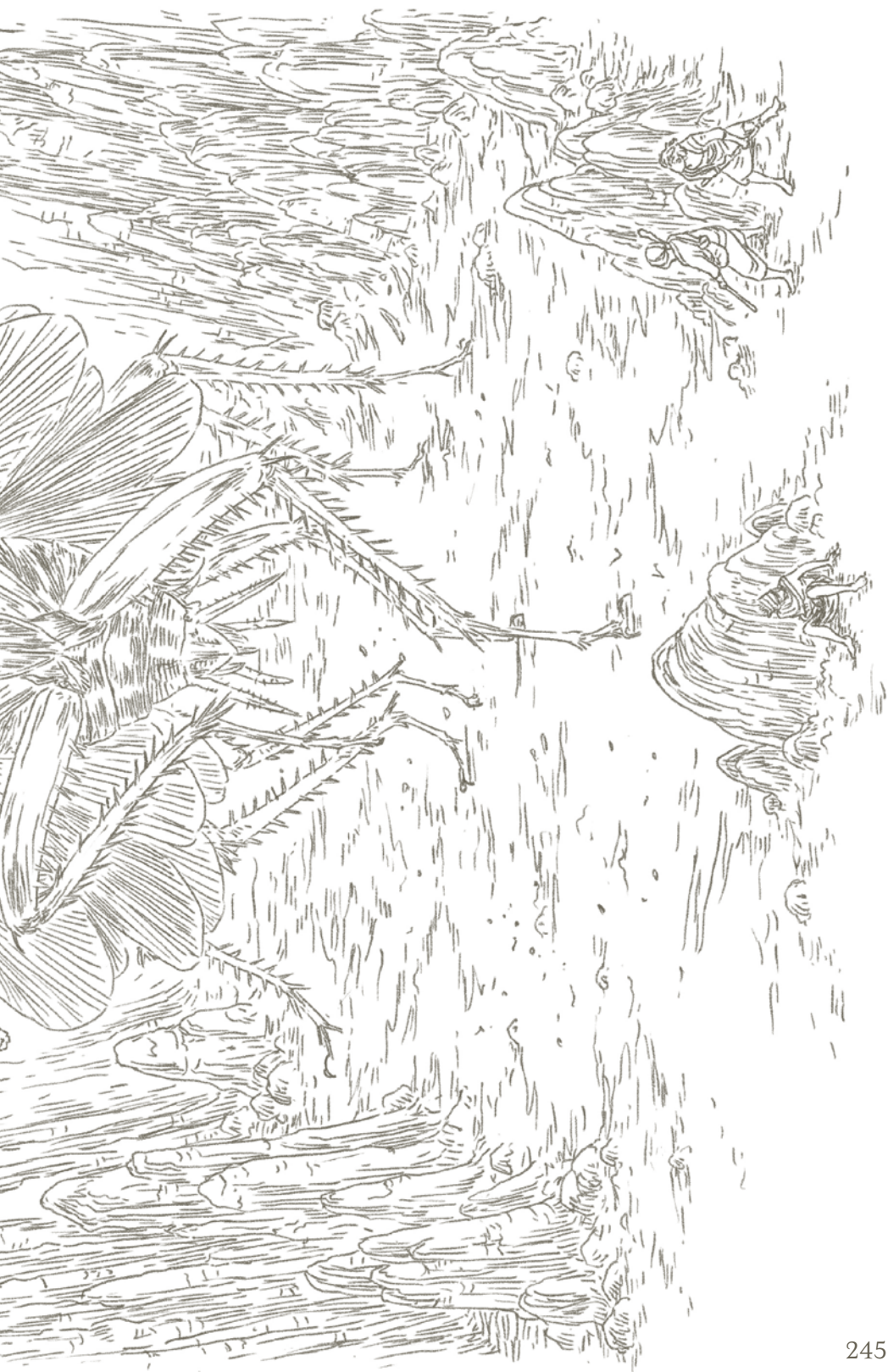


He is not a good parent. He is merely hungry,  
and on the lookout for powerful flavours. Are you food?  
Are you a follower? Service to him is simple:

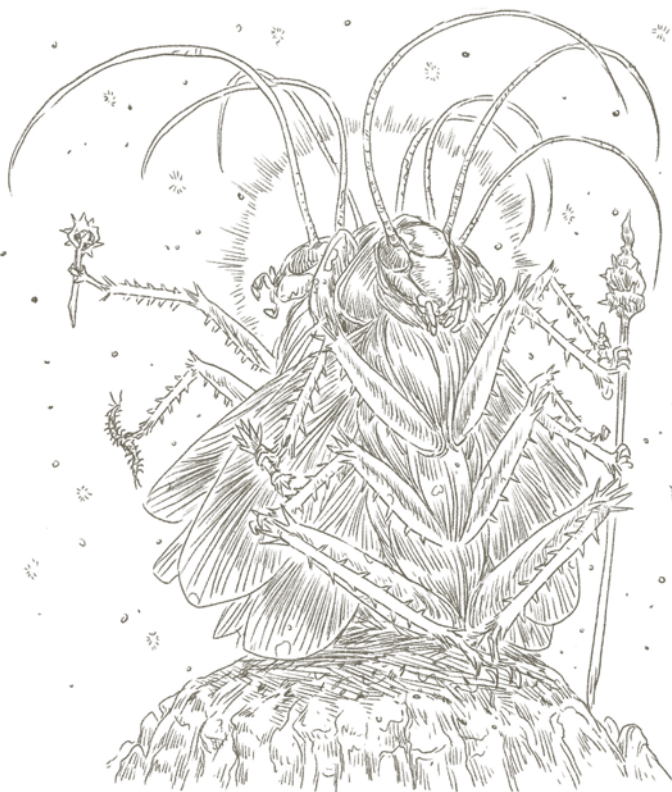
Bring him food.  
Bring him followers.

In that order, over and over, forever.









## “ODOYOQ” Roach God

᠋ *Overwhelming. Hale. Sensing, surviving, sorcery.*  
᠋ *Sacred sceptres. Blessed wings, accursed spines, divinity.*

In his presence, whenever you speak, you sing praises to Odoyoq.

Praise his unbreakable skin. His feelers that sense the unseen. His wings that bring whirlwinds. His belly gushing intoxicant milk.

Praise his wisdom; he knows all his wizards' magics; he knows any spells you know. Praise his magnanimity; his phalluses inject life into his fallen children. Praise his love; meet his gaze, and greet him in your dreams.

---

# A GOD ALWAYS REBORN



In a hollow, in a stalactite as wide as a mountain, in an expanse that was the chest of his eldest brother—the god Odoyoq laid his ootheca.

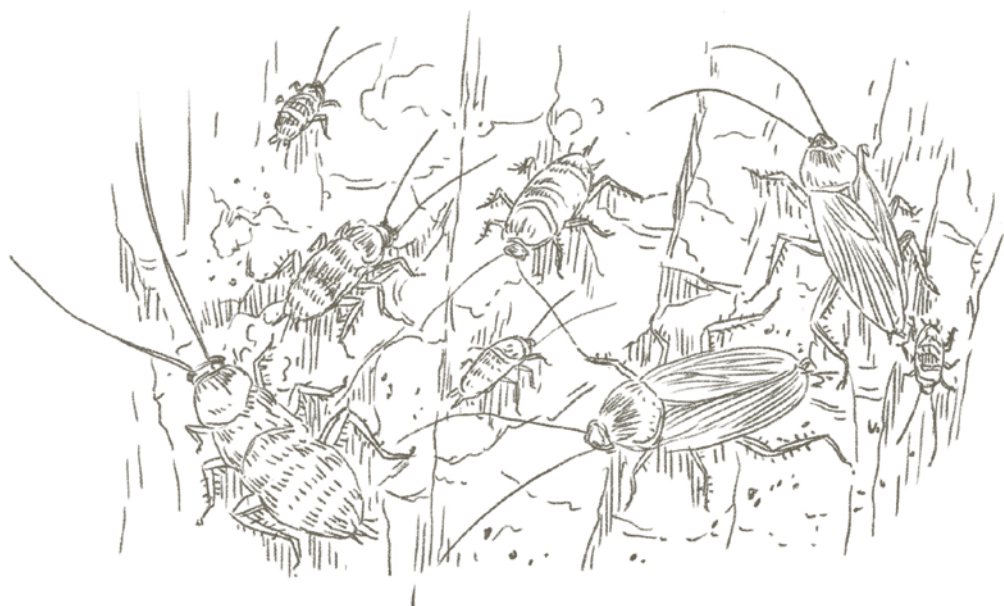
There it remains, fecund. Guarded by wizards.

There are always thirteen monarchs in roach-dom. If one falls, another is hatched.

There is always one god of roach-kind. If Odoyoq is slain, his ootheca squirms; in seventy-two hours he re-emerges.

Smash the ootheca, and such  
successions end.





## CHAPTER 7

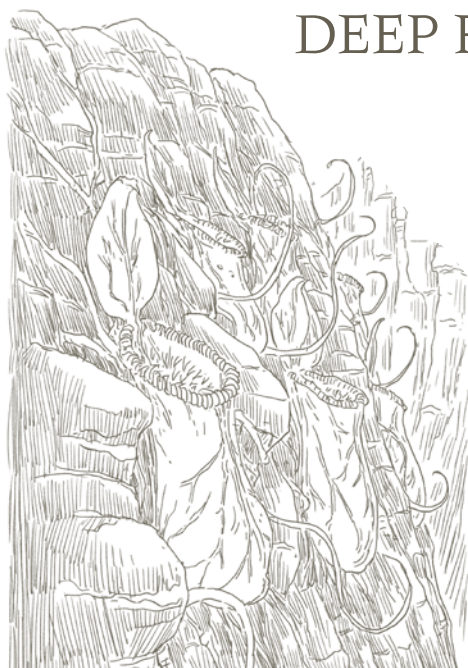
# OTHER PEOPLES IN THE DARK



Those who prosper,  
those who are prey,  
those who perish







# DEEP FLORA

## FALSE PITCHERS

*Ordinary. Hale. Beckoning, tangling, digesting. Tendrils. Tough skin.*

If you can smell, you don't see them.  
You see somebody in distress.

Do you climb down to help?  
False pitchers grow in pits, on ledges  
—difficult ground. When they have  
you in a bad spot, their tendrils lash  
out. Their lure vanishes.



What did their lure say?

1 Hyperventilating.

2 Inconsolable.

3 Hoarse.

4 Apologetic.

5 Indignant.

6 Stammering.

1 "I think my arm's broken!"

2 "My baby is so cold, so cold."

3 "Been stuck here for six torches."

4 "My rope snapped mid-climb."

5 "Roach soldiers did this to me."

6 "No way out. There's no way."

This lure can answer as many questions convincingly  
as there are false pitchers here.



## THORN TIGER

*Extraordinary. Hale. Hunting, scenting, regenerating. Claws. Paw, hide.*

The perfume of night flowers. The hairs on your neck rise.

Cubs sprout by rimstone pools, and suckle their mother's nectar. In a week they are mobile. In a year they hunt for themselves. Very silent, and very good.

### Hunted in turn by:

1 Stalagmite-folk ever-monks. Hoping to eradicate this vegetable blasphemy.

2 A hunting spider. It is a matter of pride; there can be only one apex predator.

3 Pale-folk patrols. A thorn tiger has been stealing children from local villages.

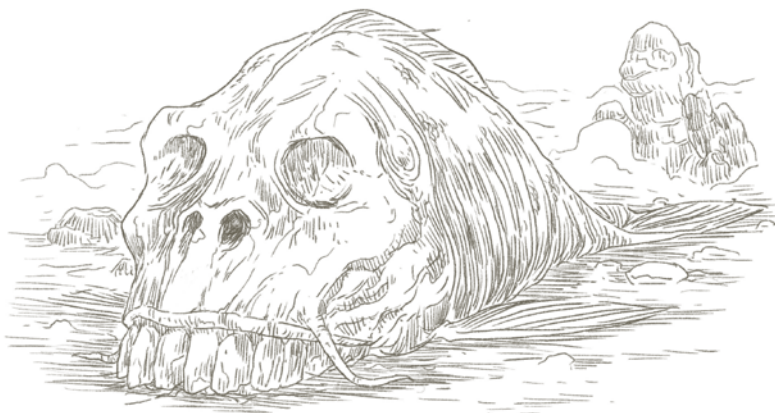
4 Fuzz zombies. Something about its fragrance drives them to frenzied rage.

5 Chitin wizards, in Ma Kunhekaq's service. Hoping to raise tigers in captivity.

6 Sri Duka Tira, snake god. Tigers are shapes she remembers, and despises, and fears.



# PALE FAUNA



## SKULL PLECO

 *Ordinary. Hale. Lurking, feeding, grabbing. Suckermouth. Bony back.*


Empty eye sockets, staring from the water's surface.

It once fed on a boat-wreck. Now it is a dedicated osteophage. The skull pleco will wait until you are in trouble—then help you to your death.

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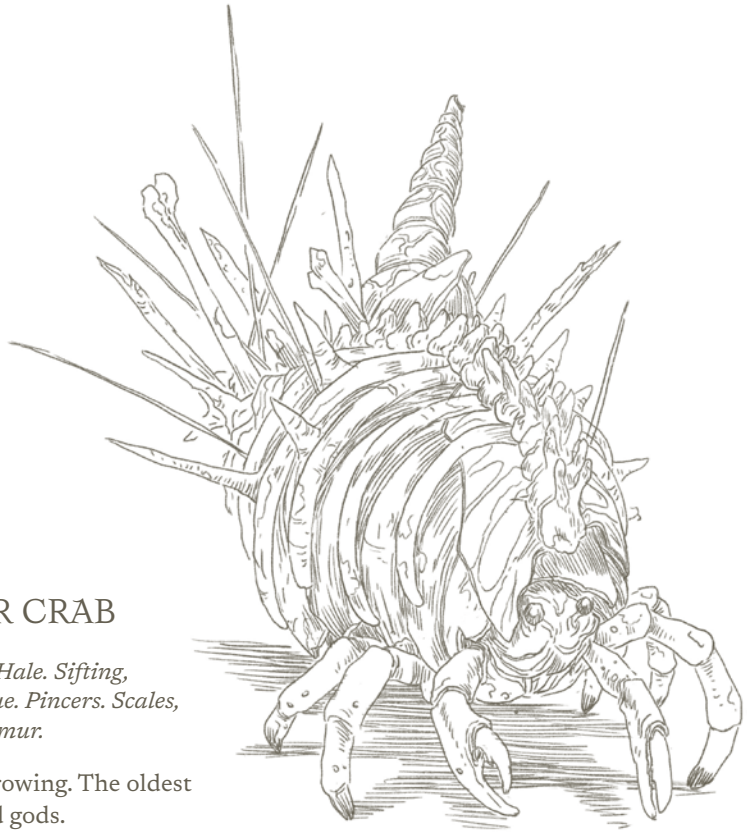
## SNAIL-HEADS

 *Ordinary. Frail. Shuffling, oozing, throwing. Slimy arms. Hard shell.*


Footprints made in slime, as lurid as rose syrup.

A river snail swallows a corpse's head, pukes slime all over its body, and walks onto dry land. One taste of slime? You faint asleep for an hour.

---



## COLLECTOR CRAB

 *Extraordinary. Hale. Sifting, mending, critique. Pincers. Scales, ribs, charmed femur.*

They never stop growing. The oldest wear shells of dead gods.

Sculptors by compulsion. A crab's home pool is marked by assemblages of bone and nacre and chitin: almost figurative, always artful.

---

### Does this crab have visitors?

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 They stole from the City of Peace. Now ghosts won't leave them alone.     | 4 They are a famous artist. A spider sage is their best and oldest patron.   |
| 2 They are skilled armourers. Pale-folk warriors browse new shields.        | 5 They hoard weapons of milk iron. Roach peacekeepers will seize these.      |
| 3 They found a bat-folk prince, slain. His vassals are here for his corpse. | 6 They stole one of Yubo Doyu's bone plates. Her followers will retrieve it. |
-

# SIX-LIMBED FOLK



## CRICKETS


*Ordinary. Hale. Spear arts, blustering, percussion.  
Iron club. Charmed bracelet.*

Mean as teenage bullies from abusive homes.

They lost their homeland long ago. Now they never speak. This doesn't stop them. They rove in bands: picking fights; seizing what they can.

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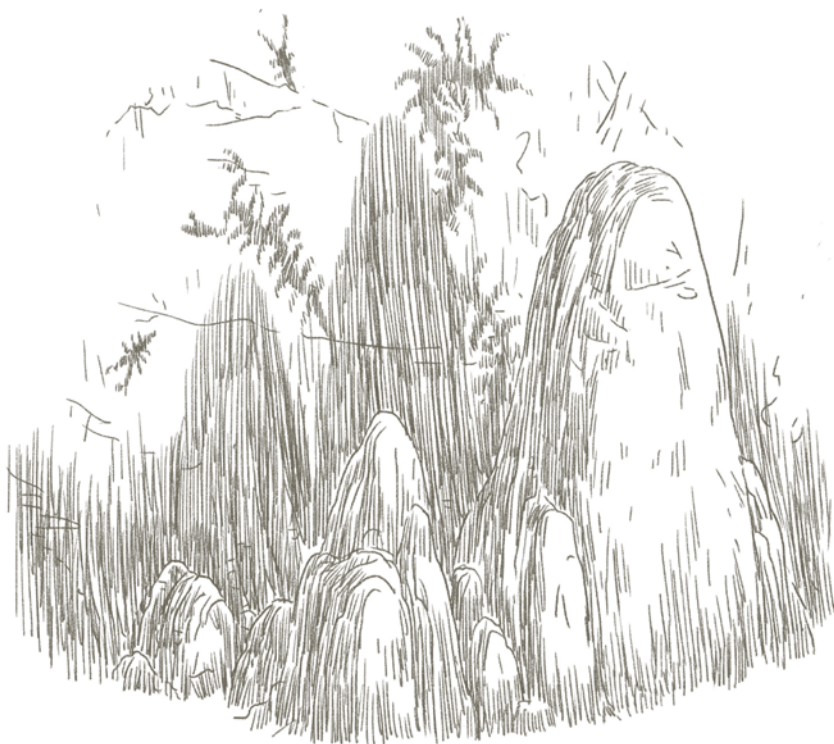
## SHADOW BUGS

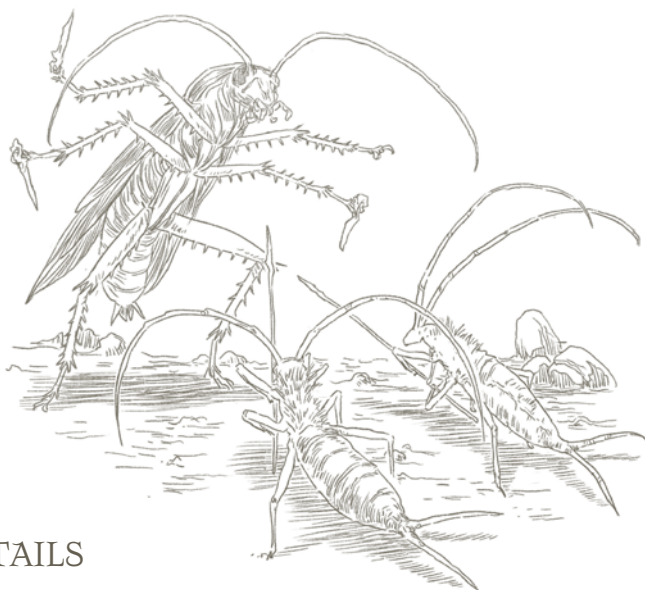
 *Ordinary. Frail. Hiding, crowding, chewing. Many mouths. Unprotected.*

A carcass, sinking slowly into the ground. Shadows teem about it.

Shadow bugs. Two-dimensional insects. Easy to kill: smash the rock they are on. But they could be anywhere, past your torch-light, and they always come in swarms.

---





## SPRINGTAILS

*Ordinary. Frail. Leaping, listening,  
poetry. Bone spears. Unprotected.*

Small as feral cats who flee when you call.

They are often prey. They are a people on the run.  
Their herds follow the fungal seasons: arriving with  
blooms, departing with die-offs.

What trails their wake?

1 Pale-folk parties. They enjoy the pop of springtail eggs.

2 A thorn tiger. The herd will attract bigger, tastier quarry.

3 Moonwhales. For the psychic krill from so many minds.

4 A trade caravan. These migrations make their schedule.

5 Tunnelworms. Frolicking in the shit-mounds left behind.

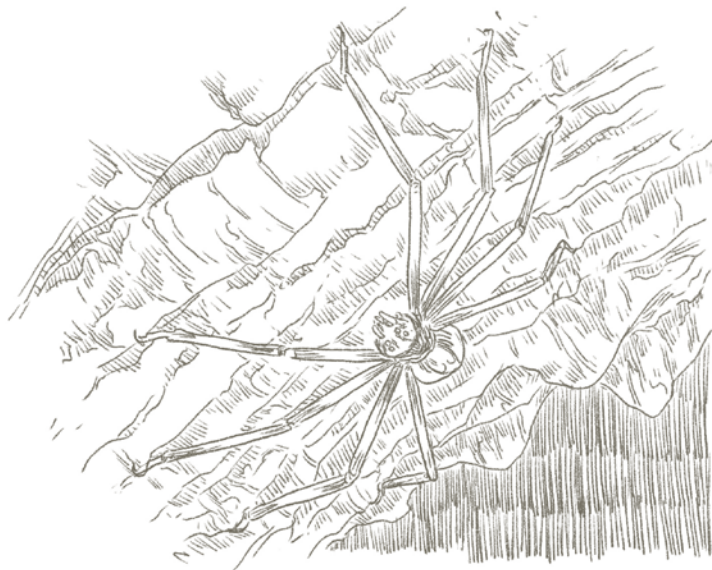
6 A bullock-sized collector crab. Collecting moulted chitin.



# EIGHT-LIMBED FOLK

Spiders are divine, descended as they are from the dead gods of the world. They are Odoyoq's oldest enemies.

Many practice the dreaming art. Such masters gather in Fifteen Virtues Fortress, a gossamer city that exists in their psyches.



This spider:

1 Is downy white, with red stripes.

2 Has branching abdominal spines.

3 Has a thorax fully covered in eyes.

4 Is hampered by a comedic lankiness.

5 Has pedipalps ending in monkey paws.

6 Changes skin colour, for camouflage.

1 Speaks commands; their web obeys.

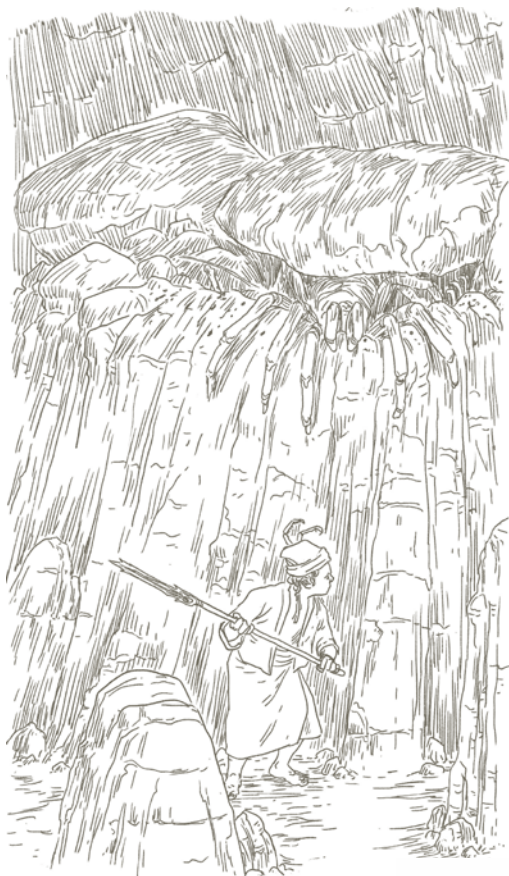
2 Is blind. Feels the slightest tremors.

3 Has fangs oozing paralytic venom.

4 Speaks as a voice in your mind.

5 Spits goo that melts all metals.

6 Soars on webbed-up legs.



## APOSTATE SPIDER

☞ *Extraordinary. Frail. Waiting, dreaming art, nightmare-craft. Swipe. Tough abdomen.*

Something was after you, in your dream. Something is still after you.

Did you touch silk from an apostate spider? Now they may command your body; walk your dreams; swallow your sleeping mind. Are you still asleep?

---

## HUNTING SPIDER

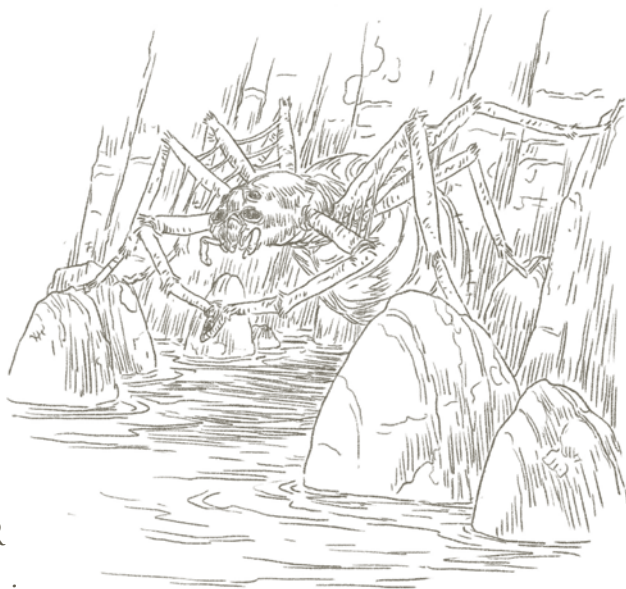
☞ *Powerful. Hale. Watching, trap-craft, killing arts. Fangs. Hardened abdomen, armoured legs.*

Rhino-sized. Quieter and nimbler than you expect.

Saints of predation. They hunt those who hunt others. The fur on their back flickers like a CRT monitor: displaying the shape of their current quarry.

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## FISHING SPIDER

*Ordinary. Hale. Swimming,  
fish-craft, weaving. Nets. Abdomen.*

The water is still. Put your ear in. You hear excited chatter.

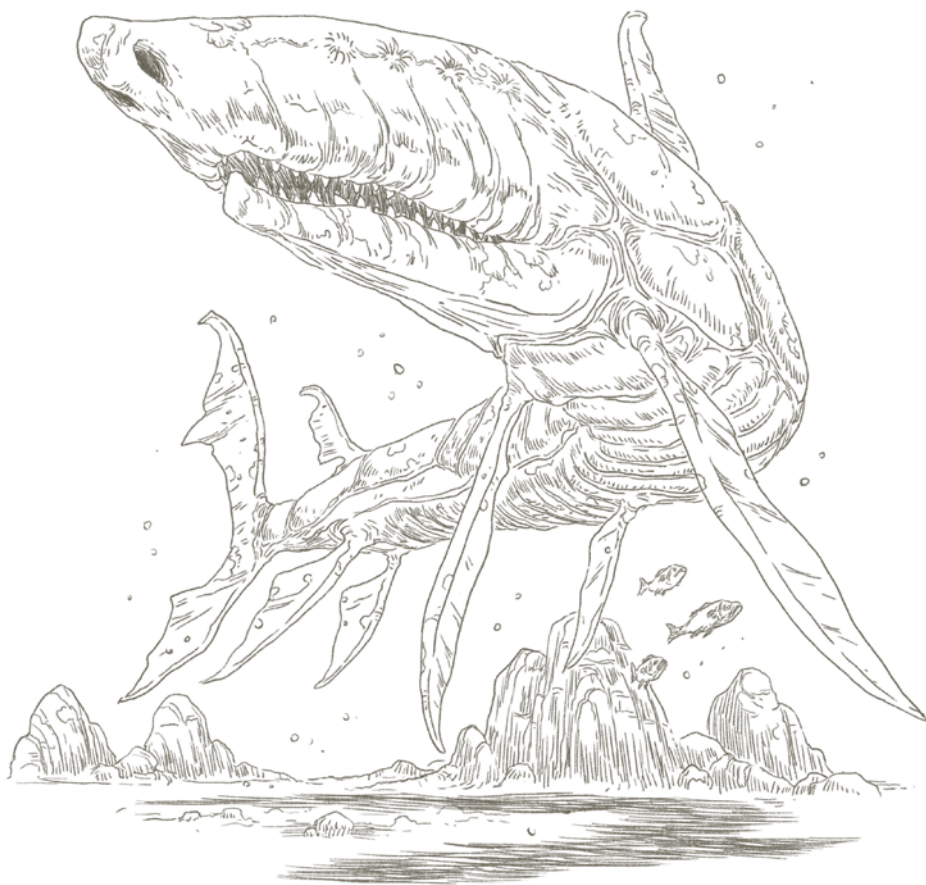
As small and as sociable as otters. They will trade river goods.  
They want baubles to hang in their bubble dens. No gems;  
they have enough of those.

---

Who trades with them already?

- 1 Bat-folk from Teeng-Seet, silver toys for fresh shellfish.  
~~~~~
- 2 Crickets, scrimshawed bone-flutes for stingray venom.  
~~~~~
- 3 Stalagmite-folk, swapping monk pearls for river pearls.  
~~~~~
- 4 Riverboat crews, daylander goods for spider-silk rafts.  
~~~~~
- 5 Snail-heads, red slime for bodies of drowned persons.  
~~~~~
- 6 Pupal dreams, pretty wing-scales for sunken salvage.  
~~~~~

# LESSER POWERS



## “YUBO DOYU” Shark God

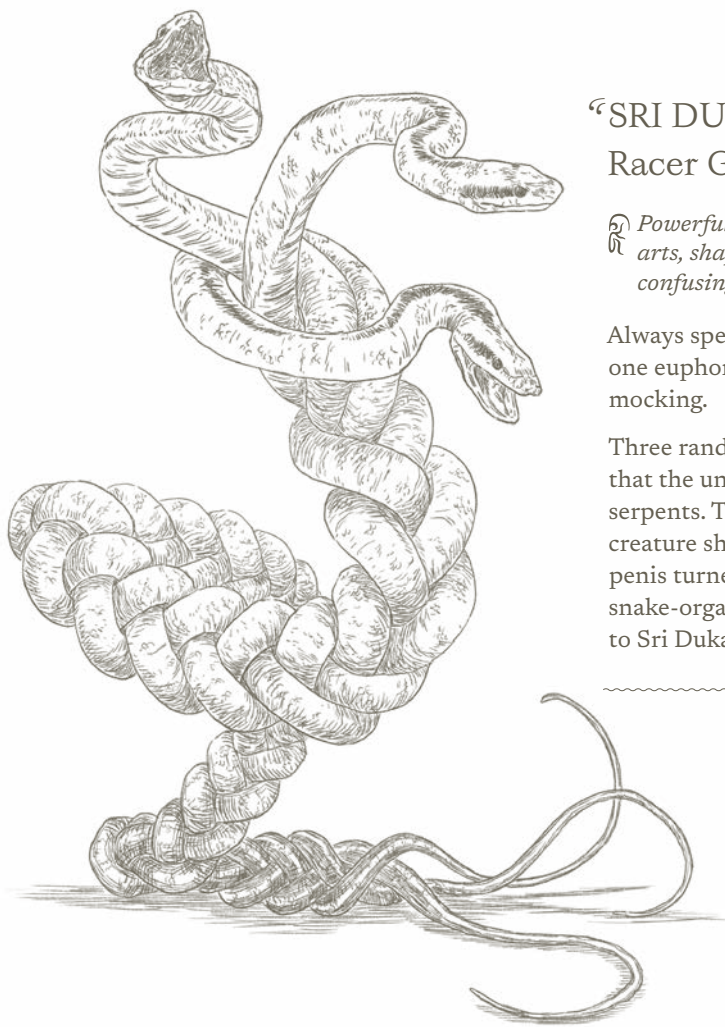
*Powerful. Hale. Swimming, scenting, gossiping.  
Jaws. Armoured nose, armoured back, armoured belly.*

A dorsal fin surfaces. All mortals who see it fall to their knees.

Yubo Doyu is blind, but his nose is never wrong. Are you seeking something? If it exists in any body of water under the earth, he knows its location.

The price for his wisdom is high: the life of a companion.

---



## “SRI DUKA TIRA”

### Racer God

*Powerful. Hale. Slithering, spell arts, shaping. Triple bite. Scales, confusing knots.*

Always speaks in three voices: one euphoric, one wroth, one mocking.

Three random spells. Annoyed that the underworld has so few serpents. To correct this, any creature she bites has an arm or penis turned into a snake. These snake-organs are always loyal to Sri Duka Tira.

#### Who serves her already?

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1 A pale-folk town. Has cut all ties with neighbours and outsiders.      | 4 Maybe-men. The worms are riveted by her physiological abilities. |
| 2 Cricket tribes. They will not be bitten, but bring her others to bite. | 5 A fishing-spider commune. Delighted by their eight snake-y legs. |
| 3 A lava-folk clan. Pushy evangelists. You won't be able to say no.      | 6 Cobrocks. This makes them anathema to other driptone beings.     |





## PUPAL DREAMS

*Ordinary. Frail. Flying, dancing, observing. Proboscis. Unprotected.*

Iridescent scales fall from their wings.

Vissivassi will be a goddess of magic and rain. For now, she sleeps: a pupa the size of a cavern. Her dreams wander the world. What they do will shape her.

### Person-sized moths. This pupal dream:

- |                                |                                   |   |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1 Has the wings of a dove.     | 1 Craves sweet treats.            | 1 Casts Iceball, once every twelve hours. |
| 2 Has smiling human teeth.     | 2 Desires every male they meet.   | 2 Dissolves textiles at a touch.          |
| 3 Has a scorpion-tailed rear.  | 3 Wishes to take a sentient life. | 3 Blinds anybody they look at.            |
| 4 Has tusks like an elephant.  | 4 Is an enthused pyromaniac.      | 4 Casts Command Metal, at will.           |
| 5 Has monkey paws for legs.    | 5 Wants to destroy a love.        | 5 Casts Wings To Eggshells, at will.      |
| 6 Has peacock-feather feelers. | 6 Hopes to kill a god.            | 6 May possess insects. One at a time.     |

# DRIPSTONE PEOPLES

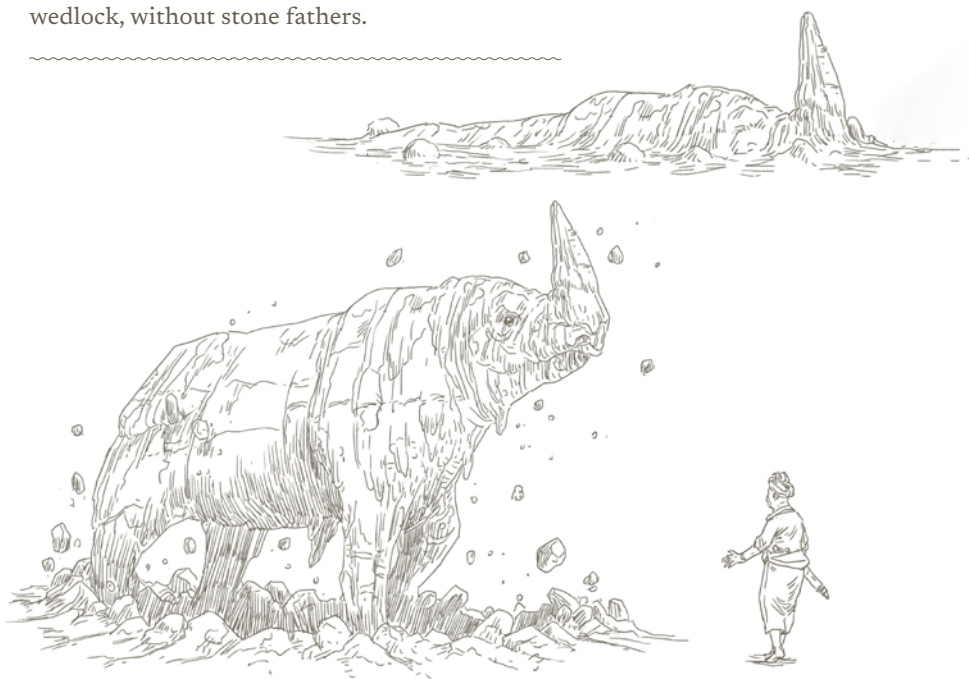


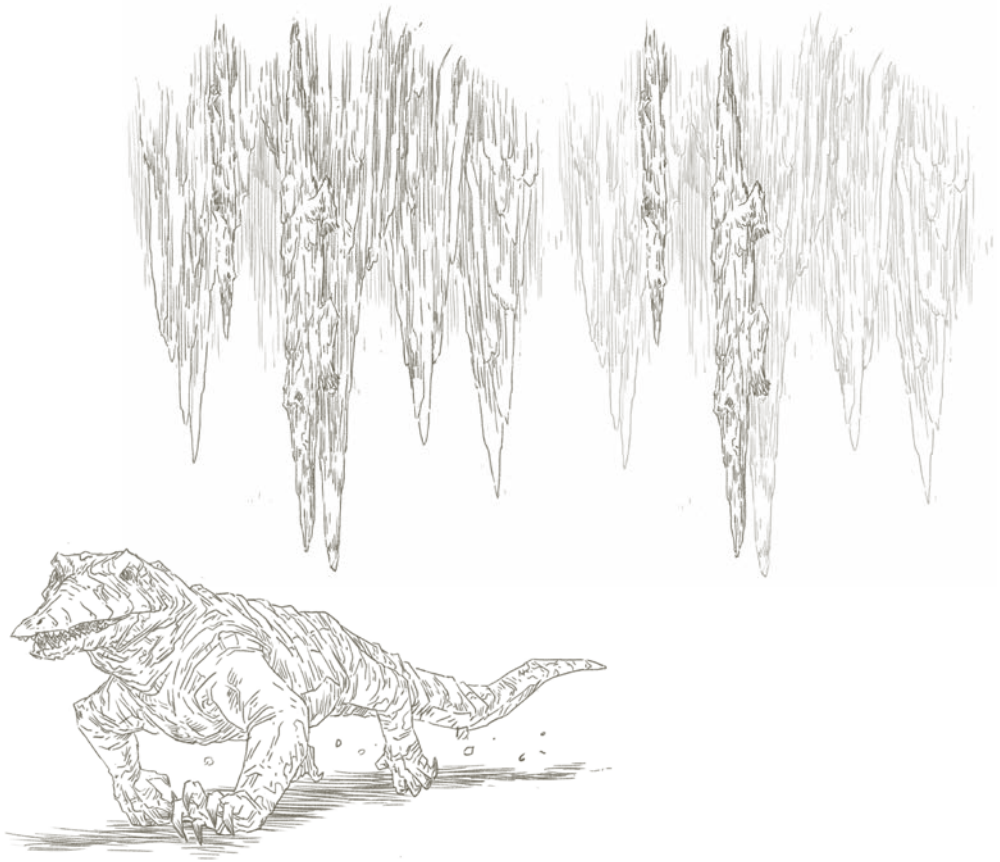
## STALAGMITE ANIMALS

*Extraordinary. Hale. Camouflaging, charging, cutting. Sharp edges. Stone body.*

You think it a mere speleothem. You are wrong.

They are Mother Water's children, born out of wedlock, without stone fathers.






They are born throughout the deep:

- 1 Rockupines. A bouquet of quills, reinforced with iron cores.  
~~~~~
- 2 Rockodiles. All sharp angles. They dive at you from above.  
~~~~~
- 3 Rhinocerocks. Goring horn. Will eat coal and shit diamonds.  
~~~~~
- 4 Cobrocks. Polished hood. Spits venom: turns flesh to chalk.  
~~~~~
- 5 Parockeets. Jewelled plumage. Talks. Viciously mocks you.  
~~~~~
- 6 Terrockpins. Phallic head. Beak snaps through any material.  
~~~~~

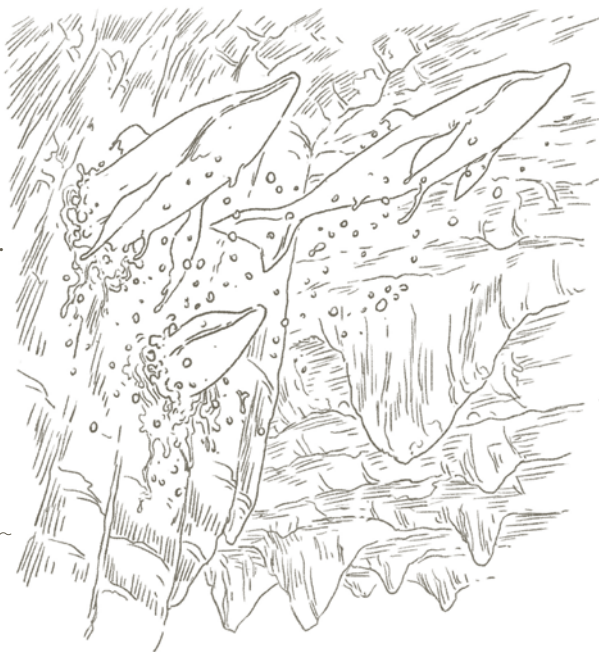
## MOON FISH

 *Extraordinary. Frail.  
Navigating, seeping, singing.  
Fins. Milk bodies.*

Out of the walls burst liquid fish.  
You are misted by salty spray.

They are schools of tuna, or  
dolphins, or whales. Made of  
moonmilk, swimming through  
air and solid earth. Thoughts are  
difficult in their presence, and  
words impossible.

---



Seen where their invisible seas intersect with  
the caverns of the world.

Who awaits them?

- 1 A spider sage hunts a black moonwhale. It took his third right leg.  

---
- 2 Pale-folk make a festival, dancing and singing with moondolphins.  

---
- 3 Thorn tigers sit in their path—bathing in, sipping from their bodies.  

---
- 4 Stalagmite-folk trap them. Moonoctopus cream hydrates the skin.  

---
- 5 Roach marines try to snare a moondugong. For Pa Ippodo's bed.  

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- 6 Bat-folk nuns chart their movements. Vital data for their auguries.  

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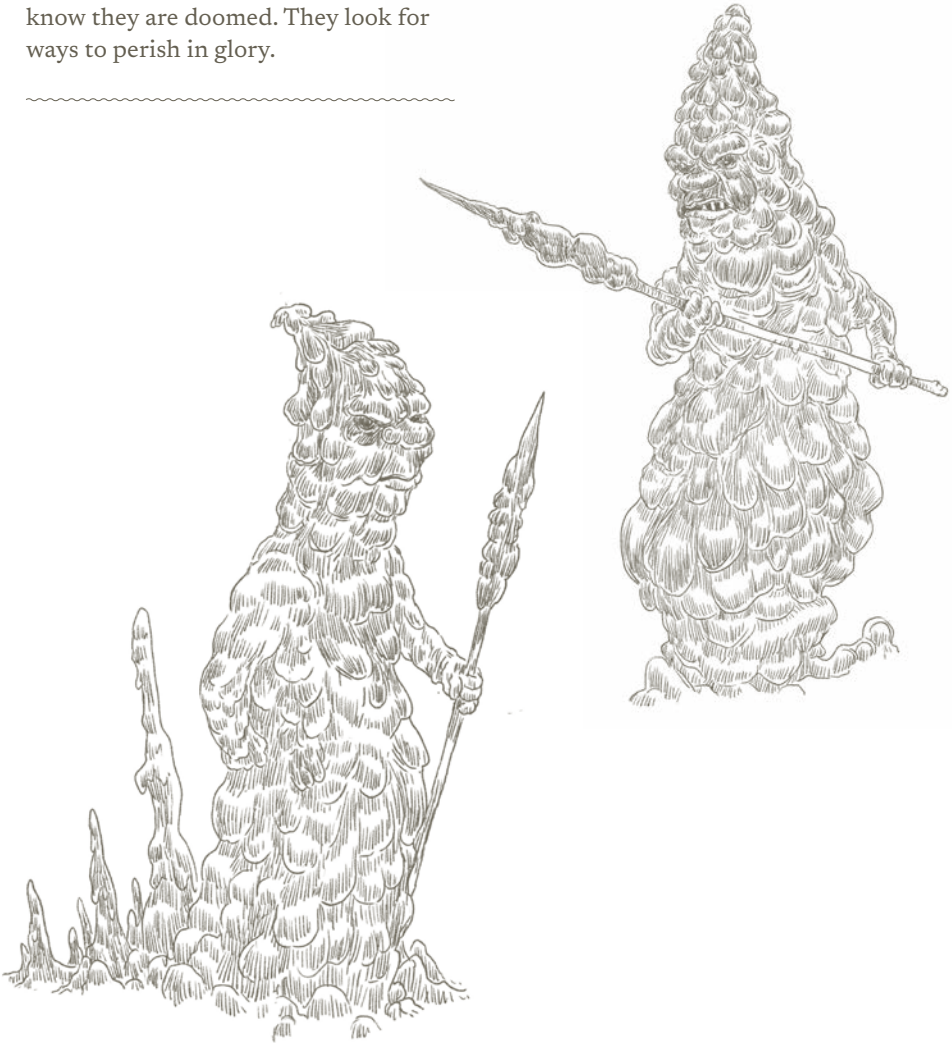
## LAVA-FOLK

*Extraordinary. Hale. Spear arts, boasting, cooking. Glass spear. Stone skin.*

Voices and actions sped up, as if at two-times speed.

Children of Mother Fire. She abandons them as soon as they are born. They know they are doomed. They look for ways to perish in glory.

---





# WORMS IN THE EARTH



## TUNNELWORMS

☞ Ordinary. Hale. Boring, eating, extruding. Needle proboscis. Unprotected.

Soft nuzzles. Light stabs to test if you're edible.

They honeycomb solid rock and leave soft substrates, where mushrooms flourish. Their digestive fluids are poisonous to stalagmite-folk.

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## NAILSTEALERS

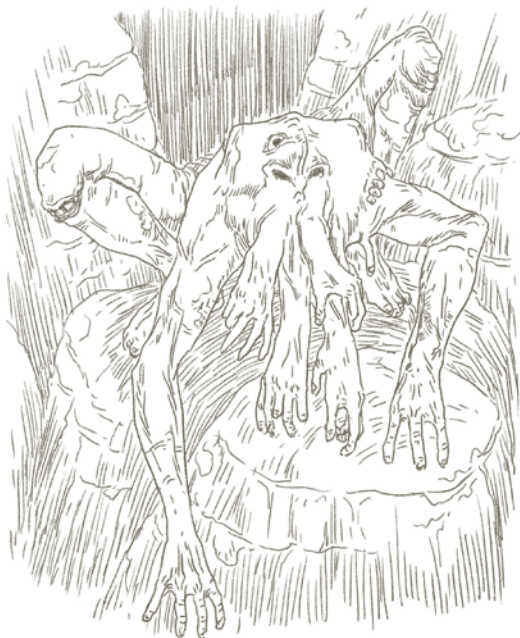
☞ Ordinary. Frail. Sneaking, stealing, caressing. Cracked nails. Squirming speed.

Viper-sized fingers with nails pulled open—mouths.

They eat caving equipment: rope; picks; pitons you used to mark the way. They carry whatever they've eaten, undigested, fat like snakes that have swallowed rats.

---





## MAYBE-MEN

*Extraordinary. Hale. Assembling, muscle arts, negotiating. Many arms. Redundant limbs.*

A person, made by things curious about what people are.

Angelhair worms form colonies similar to musculature. They salvage parts unfortunate cavers discard. Do you have any to spare?

Need a limb replaced? You can rent one, if you pay in:

1 Blood from a creature you kill. Every twenty-four hours.

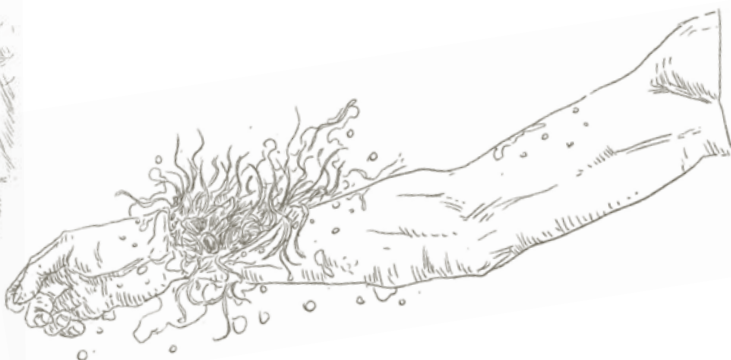
2 Sight or smell or hearing. Permanently lose this sense.

3 New flavours. You may not digest the same meal twice.

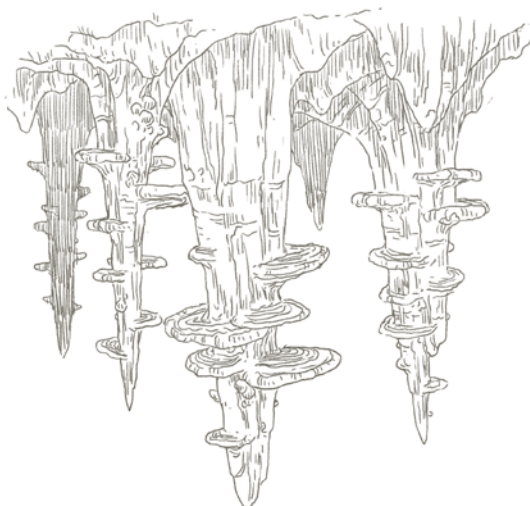
4 Memories of a friend. You permanently forget they exist.

5 Orgasms. Release must come every twenty-four hours.

6 Control of said limb. The worms will get up to mischief.



# FUNGAL BLOOMS



In and on and from and over,  
eventually, inevitably—mushrooms grow.

This growth is:

1 Dangling like a bead curtain.	1 Pale as insect larvae.	1 Spewing spores; makes you itch.
2 In shelves like ladder steps.	2 Red as a new wound.	2 Emitting a stench so bad you gag.
3 Fuzzy like low-hanging fog.	3 Spotted as rotting fruit.	3 Sweet. Ferments into good wine.
4 Ribbed like bulging brains.	4 Striped as a coral snake.	4 As sturdy as hardened leather.
5 Polyhedral like fullerenes.	5 Blue as a poisoned pool.	5 Highly nutritious, but very bland.
6 Fat like engorged cocks.	6 Black as the night around.	6 Psychotropic. Prescient visions.



## FUZZ ZOMBIES

*Ordinary. Hale. Shambling, mimicking, rationalising. Infecting touch. Unprotected.*

Fuzz infection is lethal in twelve hours, if unattended.

They died. The fuzz makes them forget this. Treat them any different than when they were alive? They get upset. When upset, they explode into fuzz.

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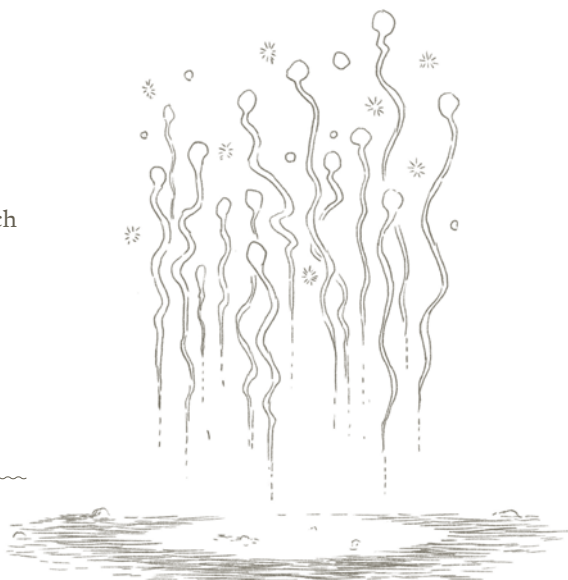
## WISE GUIDES

*Ordinary. Frail. Surrounding, penetrating, avoiding. Unarmed. Unprotected.*

Spores made of light. Do you watch them dance?

You are too dazed to notice them enter your ears. They rewire your brain. Now you see allies as foes, foes as lovers. Dead, you are substrate for their shrooms.

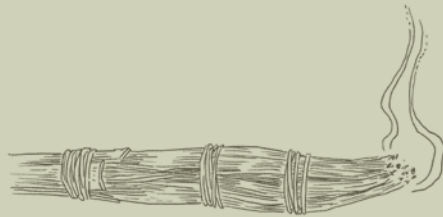
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# A WORLD IN THE DARK



Wet Air, Chill Water,  
A Hand Cupping A Torch's Glow



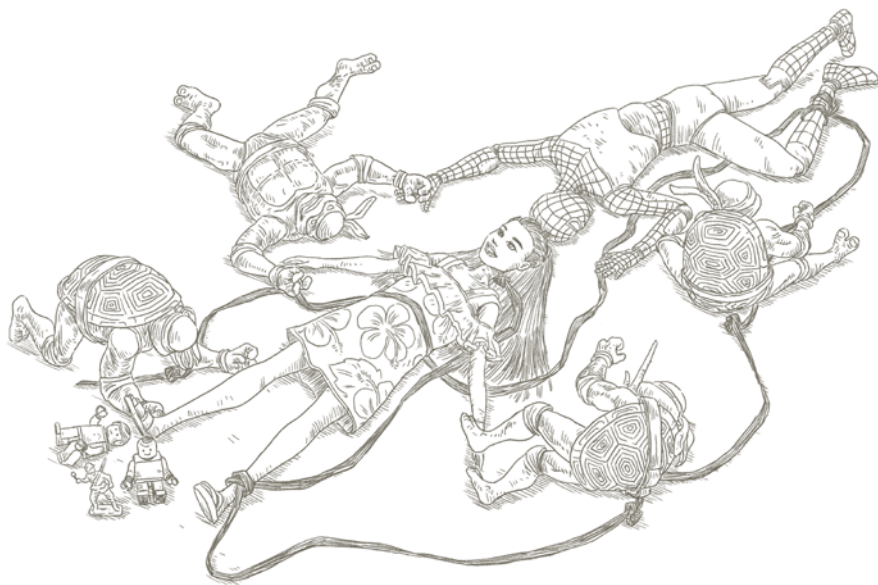


# THE WORLD



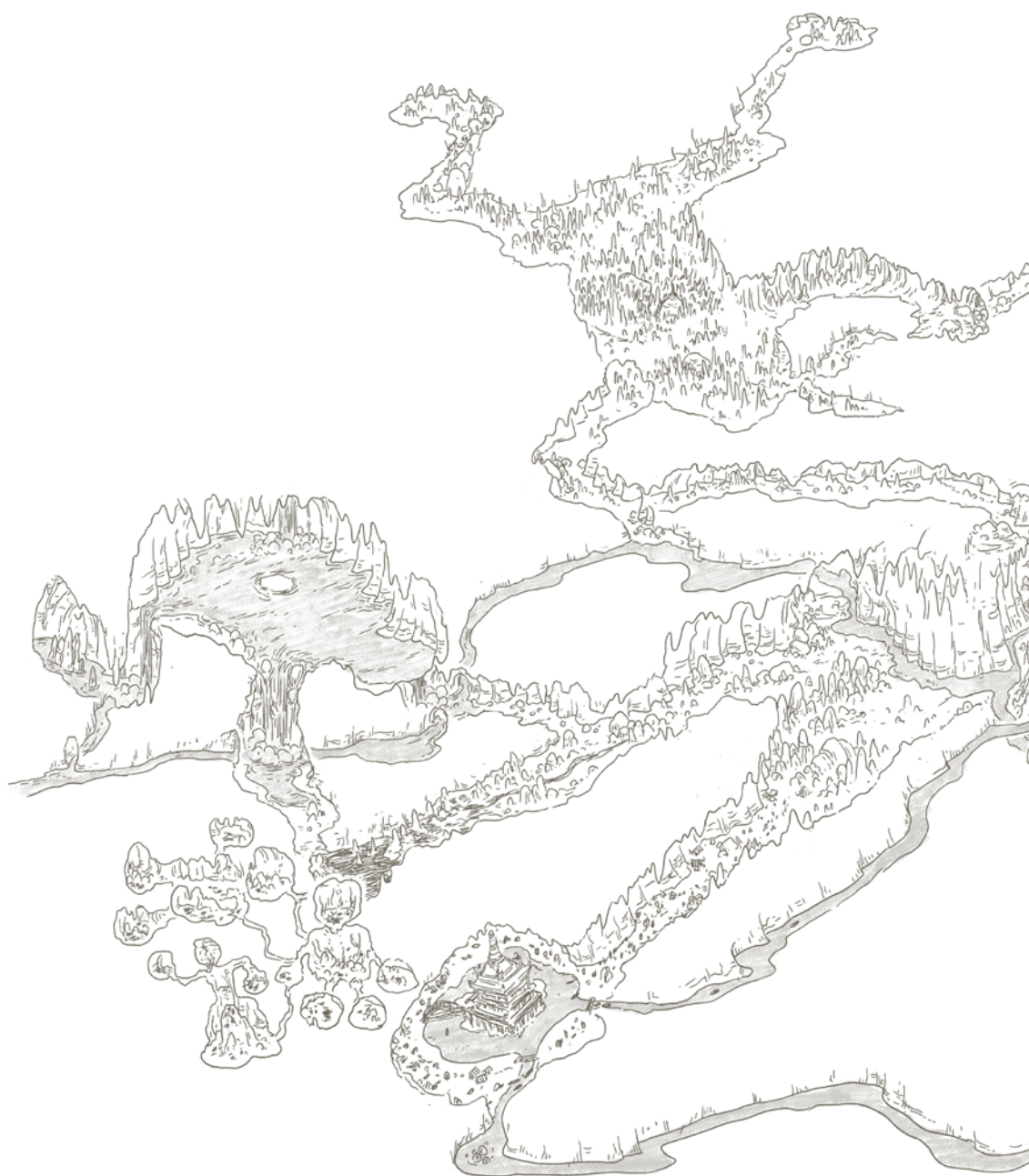
The bodies of the gods make the world. You will need:

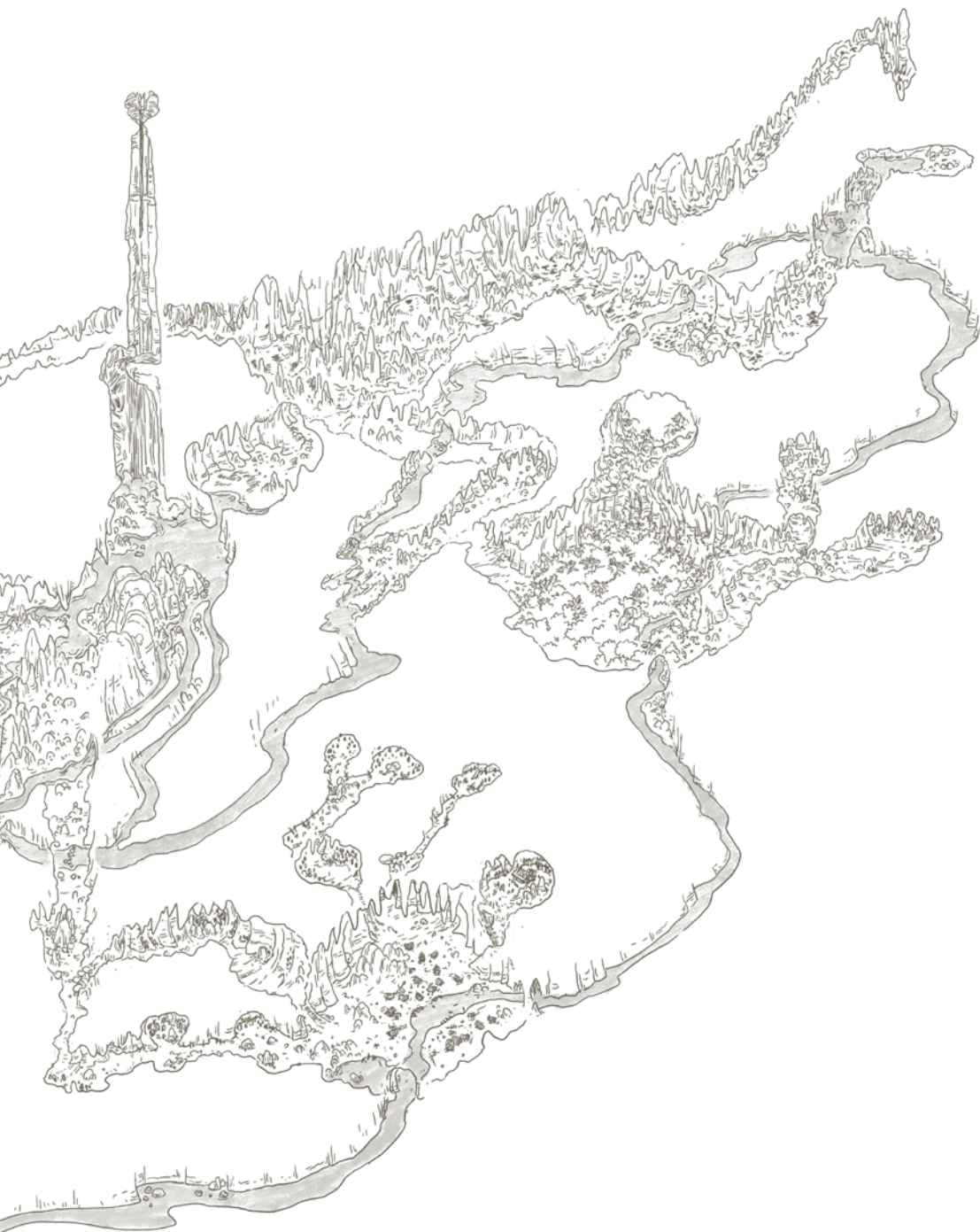
- ① At least TWO LARGE FIGURES; fashion dolls, plushies, action figures, etc.
- ② At least FOUR MEDIUM FIGURES; half the size of large figures, thereabouts.
- ③ Some SMALL FIGURES; minifigs, tabletop-wargame figures, etc.
- ④ Lengths of BLACK RIBBON.



The gods fucked and fought; they danced and they died.  
ARRANGE YOUR LARGE FIGURES AND MEDIUM FIGURES in poses  
of death and sorrow. EACH SHOULD TOUCH AT LEAST  
ONE OTHER FIGURE; more is better.

Imagine them rotting, leaving cavities where their bodies  
once were. So are the earth and its passages laid.







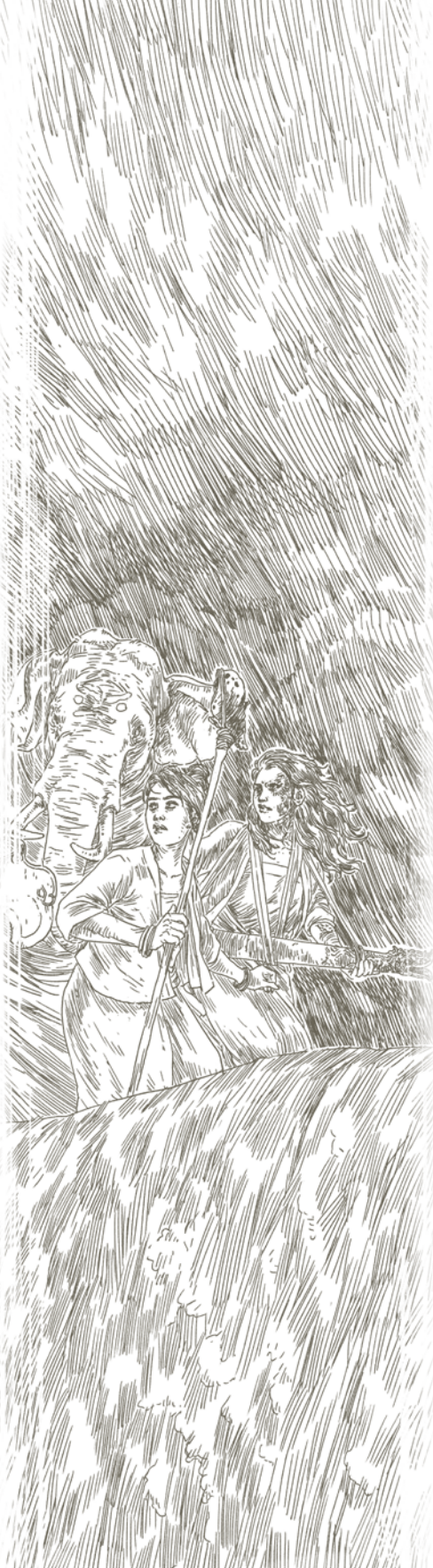
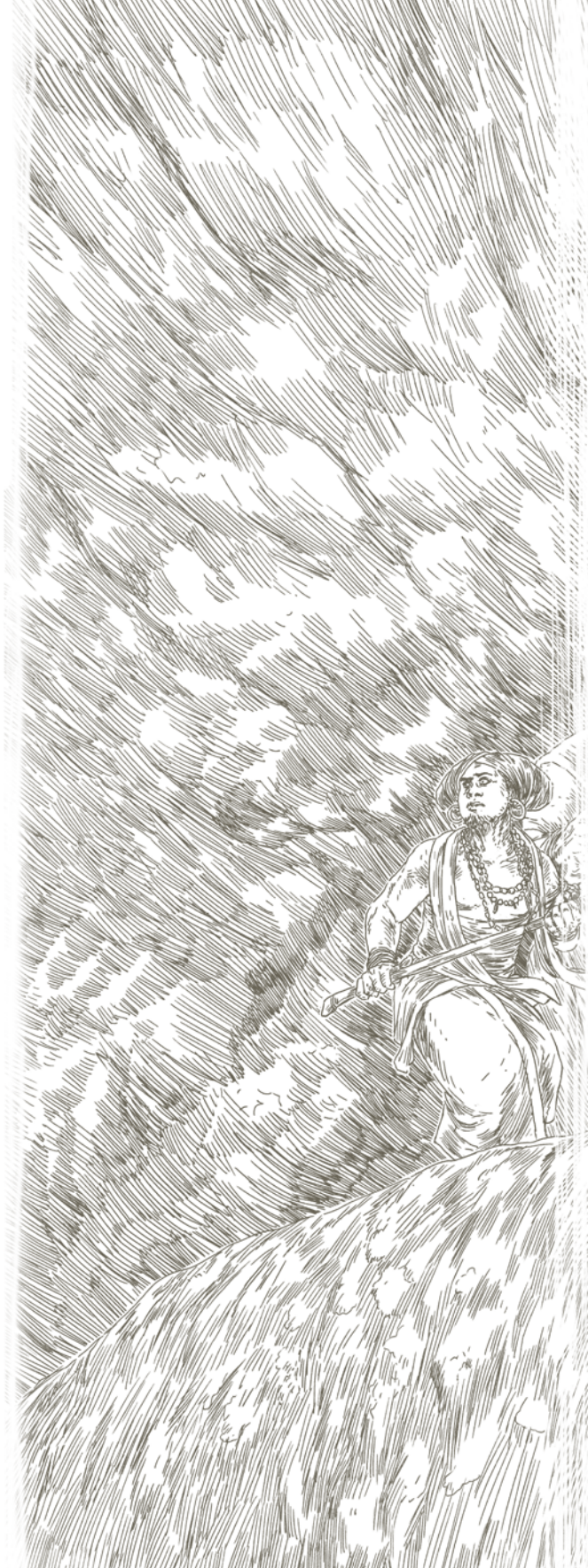
## MAJOR LOCATIONS

IDENTIFY the following:

- ① Torso of your kindest-looking large figure. Here is MUST-NOT'S WAY, under QUIET LAKE<sup>[P38]</sup>.
- ② Head of your noblest-looking large figure. Here is UDARAVA'S STAIR, under SPIDER MOUNTAIN TEMPLE<sup>[P109]</sup>.
- ③ Largest medium figure. Here is the cavern system and burial-place called the CITY OF PEACE<sup>[P113]</sup>.
- ④ Easternmost medium figure. Here is the sinkhole forest and home caverns of BU-NI-ANG-KA<sup>[P186]</sup>.
- ⑤ Westernmost foot of your largest large figure. Here is the entrance to the home caverns of BLIND ELEPHANT<sup>[P219]</sup>.
- ⑥ Westernmost medium figure. Here are the home caverns of IBIS EGG<sup>[P209]</sup>, where Blind Elephant refugees have fled.
- ⑦ Torso of your most sinister-looking large figure. Here is the OOTHECA of THE GOD ODOYOQ<sup>[P243]</sup>.

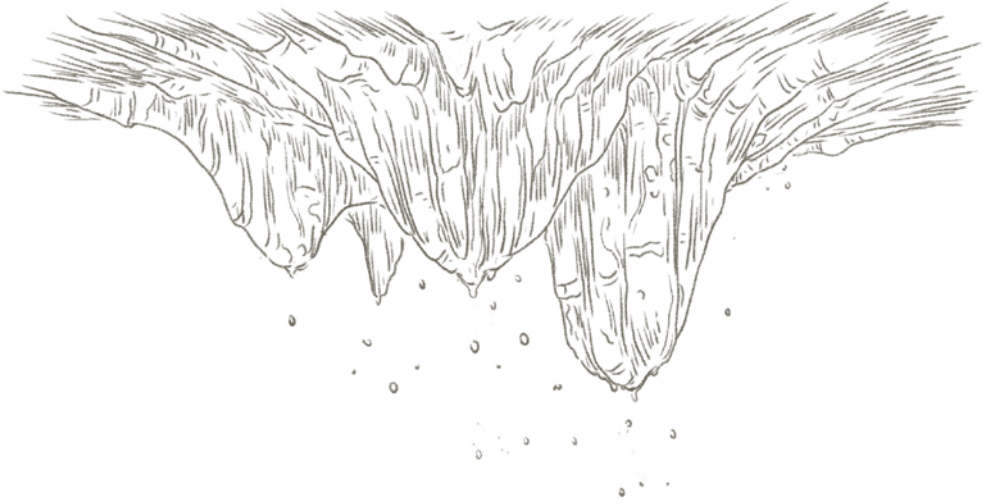








# THE RIVER



With lengths of black ribbon,  
CONNECT THESE POINTS IN TURN, making a knot at each:

- ① UDARAVA'S STAIR.
- ② Right leg of a large figure—here is DEEPER SANG-LA, a fortress and caravan-magnet. Many peoples, most goods, and PUPAL DREAMS<sup>(P263)</sup> fluttering about.
- ③ BU-NI-ANG-KA.
- ④ Torso of the CITY OF PEACE.
- ⑤ Left leg of a large figure—here is ARPUN'S WOUND: warm blood in waterfalls, fungal blooms. SRI DUKA TIRA<sup>(P262)</sup>, hissing and plotting.
- ⑥ MUST-NOT'S WAY.
- ⑦ Head of a medium figure—here is the LIBRARY OF EARS: where the speech of gods past and future echo. In shallows YUBO DOYU<sup>(P261)</sup> lazes.



The black ribbon represents a river and its course through the world.

WHAT IS FOUND IN THIS LENGTH BETWEEN KNOTS?

1 A series of LOW FALLS; vessels must be bodily carried.

2 A sulphur smell, SCALDING WATER, obfuscating steam.

3 A roof of glittering stalactites. And ROCKODILES<sup>(P264)</sup>.

4 The HISSING FOAM speaks the names of your lovers.

5 PALE CRABS rap their pincers on the rocks, in unison.

6 Traffic! FISHING RAFTS from the closest pale-folk village.

1 Fluttering. Blind FLYING FISH splashing all around you.

2 Tail fins big as sails. CATFISH that may gulp you whole.

3 Glitter on the waves. PUPAL DREAMS<sup>(P263)</sup> overhead.

4 A white shape by the bank. A RIVER CENTIPEDE<sup>(P28)</sup>.

5 A bone barge. Sharp edges. YUBO DOYU<sup>(P261)</sup> CULTISTS.

6 Six ROACH MARINES<sup>(P229)</sup>, ready for a spot of piracy.



## “SCARLET CARP SANIMI”

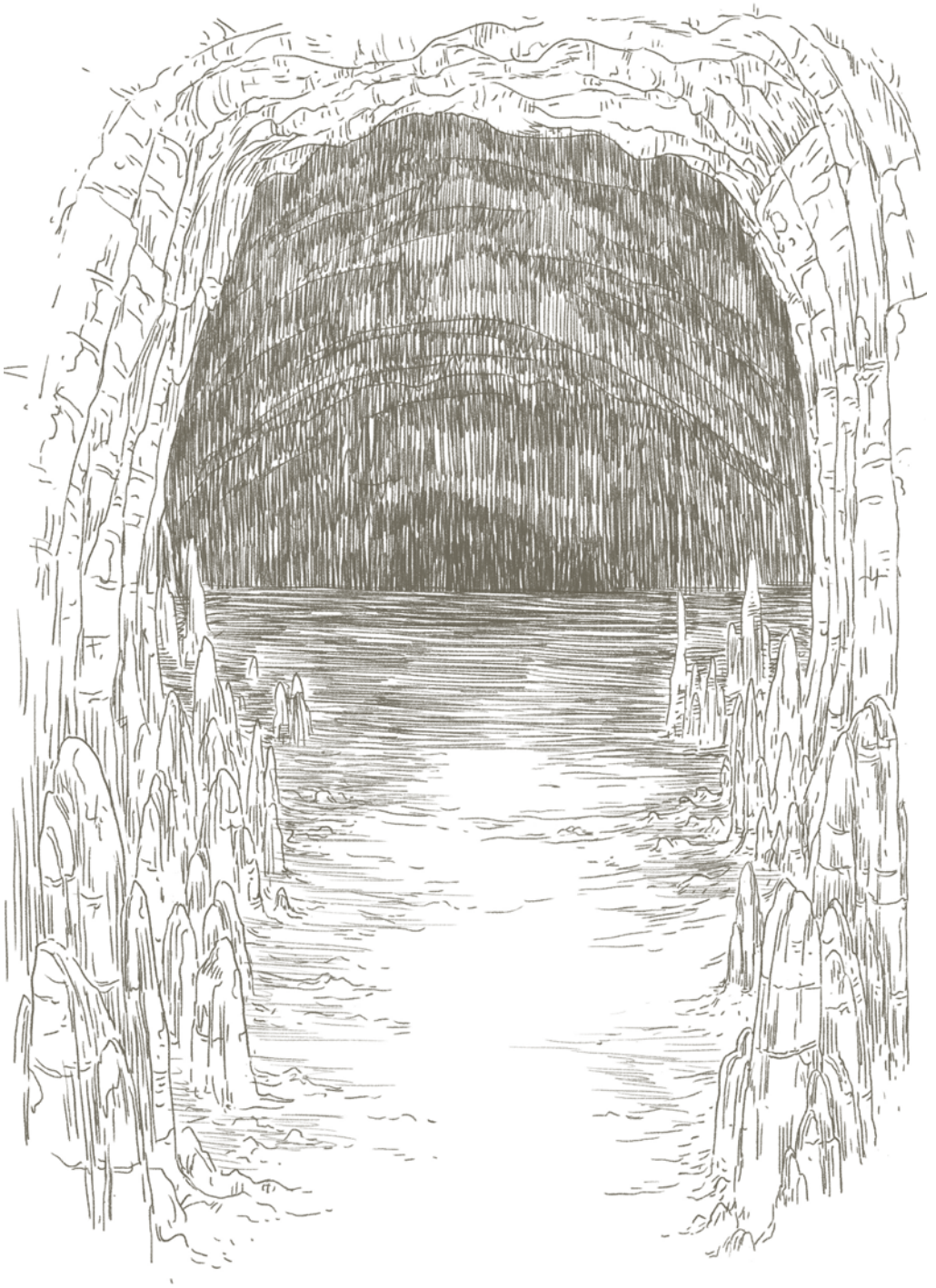
*Extraordinary. Hale. Polearm-craft, steering, juggling.  
Fishing spear. Teak-hard skin.*

Waits for you to notice that he wants your attention.

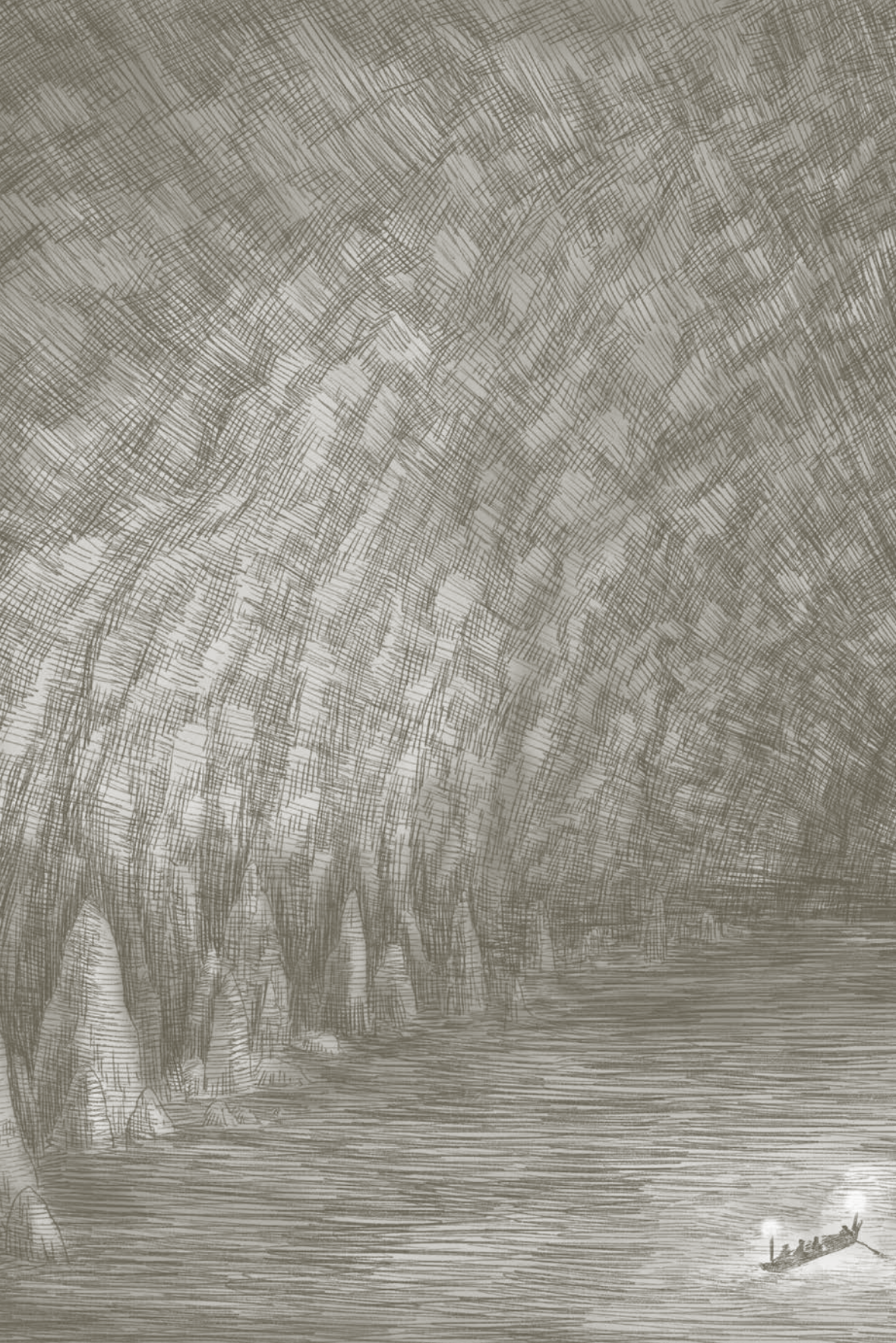
A mariner from the daylands. The war-barge he served was headstrong and offended a sea god. Now she is no more. Here Sanimi is.

Sanimi’s PAINTED EYES SEE IN UTTER DARKNESS. Never lost. Craves the seafood of his youth; bring him some and he’ll ferry you about for free.

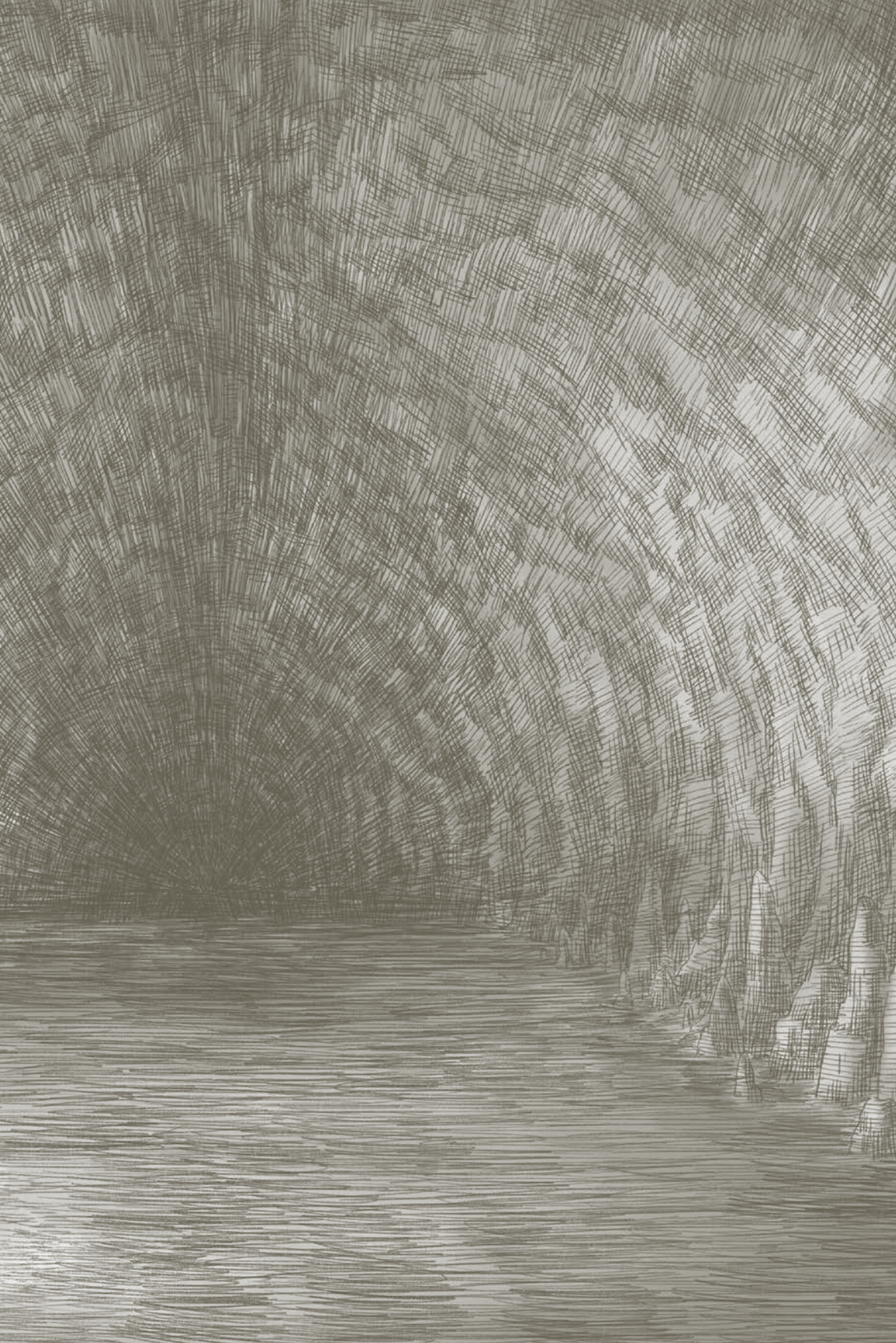












# CAVE SYSTEMS

Medium figures are cave systems. BU-NI-ANG-KA, IBIS EGG, and the CITY OF PEACE are generated in their respective chapters.  
FOR THE OTHERS, ROLL HERE.

This cave system WAS A GOD. They were:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1 Shy. The TERRAIN WANTS TO CONFUSE YOU. Got a local guide?    | 4 Bloodthirsty. Every rock surface is JAGGED ENOUGH TO CUT.  |
| 2 Trickisy. IF YOU HURRY, handholds crumble and potholes trip. | 5 Affectionate. Warm, humid air; you are ALWAYS SWEATING.    |
| 3 Restless. The ground rumbles. Watch out! FALLING DEBRIS.     | 6 Contemplative. SHAFTS OF SUNLIGHT tumble from the ceiling. |

Who now calls them home?

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1 A PALE-FOLK <sup>(P177)</sup> village. HOMES in the left arm; SINKHOLE FOREST in the head. | 4 FISHING SPIDERS <sup>(P260)</sup> . A LAKE in the torso; CONNECTED TO THE RIVER with ribbon. |
| 2 A STALAGMITE-FOLK <sup>(P201)</sup> family. CRECHE in the torso, essentially indefensible. | 5 SPRINGTAILS <sup>(P257)</sup> , temporarily. They have eaten and drunk the left leg bare.    |
| 3 A COLLECTOR CRAB <sup>(P254)</sup> . A POOL in an arm; CONNECTED TO THE RIVER with ribbon. | 6 CRICKETS <sup>(P255)</sup> . They LAUNCH RAIDS downriver, and into neighbouring depths.      |

Head and arms and torsos and legs—  
EVERY BODY-PART REPRESENTS A CAVE, with corresponding  
exits and orientations.

What is this one like?

1 Twisty ANT-FARM tunnels, wide as three women.	1 STANDING WATER, high enough to hide bodies.	1 Breeze from behind, carrying a CADAVEROUS STENCH.
2 Deep NARROW FISSURES; proceed in a single file.	2 Sumps of FLAMMABLE GAS, set off with a spark.	2 Profuse FUNGAL GROWTH <sup>{P270}</sup> , impossible to avoid.
3 LEDGES like a staircase; each step your height.	3 DRIPPING MOISTURE always aims for your head.	3 Holes in walls at waist height. TUNNELWORMS <sup>{P268}</sup> .
4 Slender ROCK BRIDGES, each wide as a fat man.	4 Bitter air claws your throat, MAKES YOU COUGH.	4 Motion at your light's edge. SHADOW BUGS <sup>{P256}</sup> .
5 STALAGMITES, packed tight as pit-trap spikes.	5 One floating light. Another. WISE GUIDES <sup>{P271}</sup> .	5 Torches, voices—cosmopolitan MARKET COMMUNITY.
6 Columns, always managing to BLOCK YOUR VIEW.	6 Cream stains. MOON FISH <sup>{P266}</sup> swim here.	6 The knock of pebbles. STALAGMITE ANIMALS <sup>{P264}</sup> .





# DEPTHS

Large figures are deep wildernesses. This depth was once a GOD of:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1 Appointed ends. If inflicted by a thinking creature, that WOUND REFUSES TO HEAL. | 4 Those who die young. Spells cast under pressure result in a RANDOM EFFECT.  |
| 2 Unexpected mercy. Lost sans light, you ARRIVE AT YOUR PREFERRED DESTINATION.     | 5 A lost city. EVERYBODY IS MUTE; spoken words are swallowed by the very air. |
| 3 The full moon. Outside a live body or river, LIQUIDS TRANSFORM INTO MOONMILK.    | 6 Motherhood. Sex always results in ONE CHILD AFTER ONE WEEK. No exceptions.  |

Head and arms and torsos and legs—  
EVERY BODY-PART REPRESENTS A REGION, with corresponding  
exits and orientations.

MUST-NOT'S WAY, UDARAVA'S STAIR, and  
ODOYOQ'S OOTHECA are described in their respective chapters.  
FOR THE OTHERS, ROLL HERE.

Who claims this region as theirs?

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1 A pair of THORN TIGERS <sup>[P252]</sup> . They HUNT for prey in all neighbouring regions. | 4 SNAIL-HEADS <sup>[P253]</sup> . A deep LAKE; CONNECTED TO THE RIVER, if possible.  |
| 2 BAT-FOLK COLONISTS <sup>[P154]</sup> . A hole in the ceiling opens to TEENG-SEET.          | 5 A LAVA-FOLK TRIBE <sup>[P267]</sup> . Strained relations with a NEARBY SETTLEMENT. |
| 3 A HUNTING SPIDER <sup>[P259]</sup> . STALKING the scariest creature in this depth.         | 6 Roaches. A ROACH ENCOUNTER <sup>[P226]</sup> . Attach a ROACH NEST here.           |

## WHAT is this region like?

1 BEETLE SWARMS in close walls; will breed in your rations.

2 The smell of rust and moisture—roaring FALLS OF BLOOD.

3 Carpeted with RUSTY SWORDS; every step a tetanus risk.

4 Boulder-sized FAT-BERGS. Buttery scent; very poisonous.

5 SWINGING BRIDGES—stiff mummies strung by spider silk.

6 CRYSTAL PILLARS; these flash-freeze anything at a touch.

1 GLOWING TREE ROOTS from the ceiling, getting in your face.

2 Sets of tracks to sets of NEAT, FOLDED CLOTHES. Mildewed.

3 Hot pools, connected by tunnels. SKULL PLECOS<sup>(P253)</sup>.

4 A distressed voice in a drop-off. FALSE PITCHERS<sup>(P251)</sup>.

5 A FUNGUS PATCH<sup>(P270)</sup>, eaten bare. SPRINGTAILS<sup>(P257)</sup>.

6 A grotto stuffed with caving gear. MAYBE-MEN<sup>(P269)</sup>.

1 A dung fire on a ledge. A FAECAL PILGRIM'S<sup>(P235)</sup> camp.

2 MOONWHALE<sup>(P266)</sup> backs breach the ground, spouting.

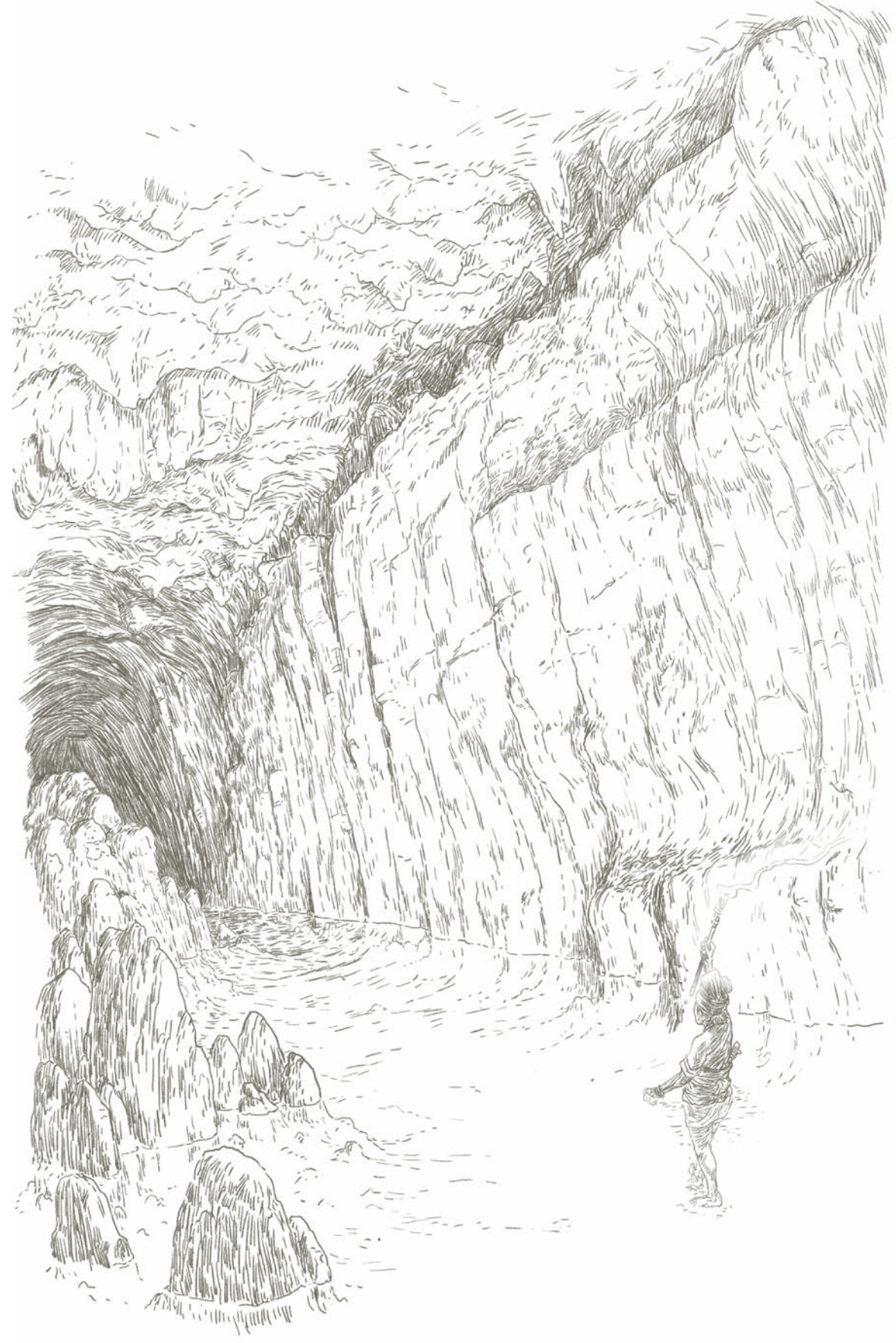
3 Cubby-holes. NAILSTEALERS<sup>(P268)</sup> are tailing you now.

4 An unlit village. FUZZ ZOMBIES<sup>(P271)</sup> mime their lives.

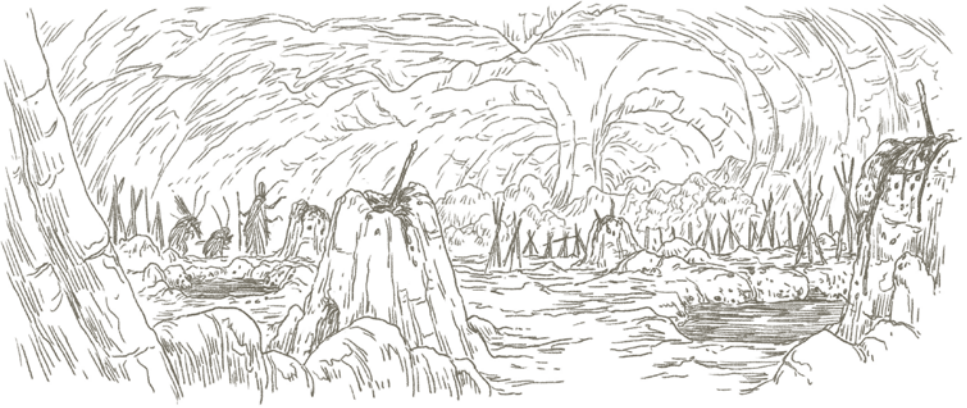
5 Shreds of web, like curtains. An APOSTATE SPIDER<sup>(P259)</sup>.

6 Torches, voices—TRADERS foraging for valuable goods.





## A NEST OF ROACHES



At the entrance to BLIND ELEPHANT<sup>{P278}</sup>,  
and ON THE PARTS OF LARGE FIGURES CLAIMED  
BY ROACHES, place small figures.

These were GODS, now turned into ROACH NESTS.

Head and arms and torsos and legs—  
EVERY BODY-PART REPRESENTS A CHAMBER, with  
corresponding exits and orientations.  
What is this chamber's purpose?



The home caverns of BLIND ELEPHANT are described in its respective chapter. FOR THE OTHERS, ROLL HERE.

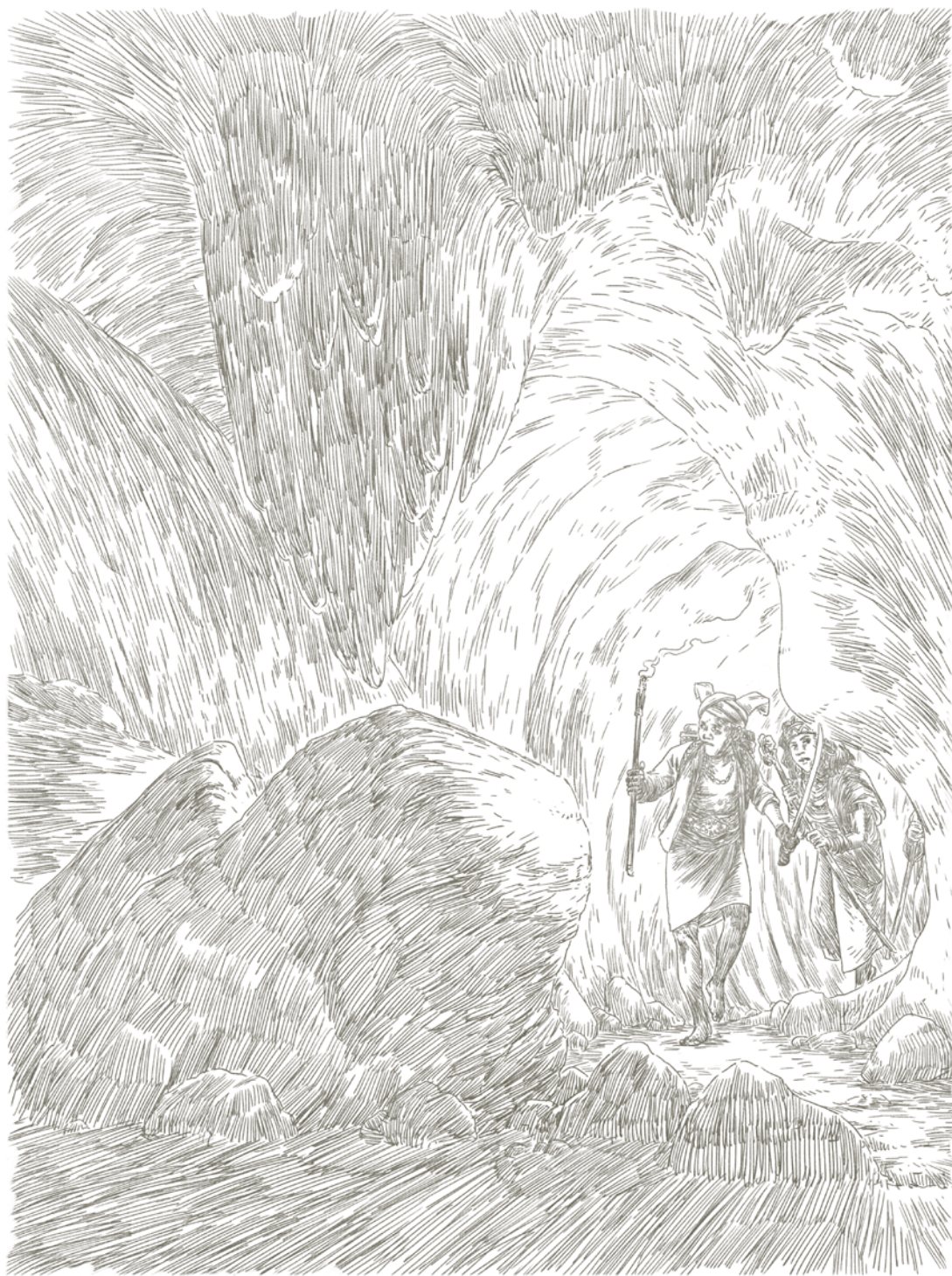
What is this CHAMBER'S PURPOSE?

- 1 A BARRACKS. Droppings and debris mortared into walls and furniture. Curtains of mould, but no privacy. Two dozen ROACH SOLDIERS<sup>(P229)</sup> feed, sleep, fuck.  
~~~~~
- 2 A NURSERY. A CHITIN WIZARD<sup>(P232)</sup>, sorting egg cases, applying creams, changing the children within into more specialised shapes. Two dozen NYMPHS.  
~~~~~
- 3 A STABLES. Twelve GUARDS. Captives go into a single cage, unfed. The hungriest eventually eat the weakest. The strongest BEAST STRAINS THE BARS.  
~~~~~
- 4 A WORKSHOP. A CHITIN WIZARD, three ASSISTANTS. Solvent pools to melt chitin. Casting moulds to make tools. Beds of volatile yeasts, brittle crystals.  
~~~~~
- 5 A TEMPLE. A PRIEST<sup>(P230)</sup> in a spider-silk stole bows to a haphazard assemblage of gems, brass, and wings. Thirteen SOLDIERS kneel and squeal prayers.  
~~~~~
- 6 A LARDER. A ROACH KNIGHT<sup>(P231)</sup> quarters here, guarding and gorging on three mounds: dead insect bodies; textiles and fibres; fleshy meats and bones.  
~~~~~

ROLL FOR ALL BODY-PARTS EXCEPT ONE. The FINAL CHAMBER is determined by the nest's current makeup. It has:

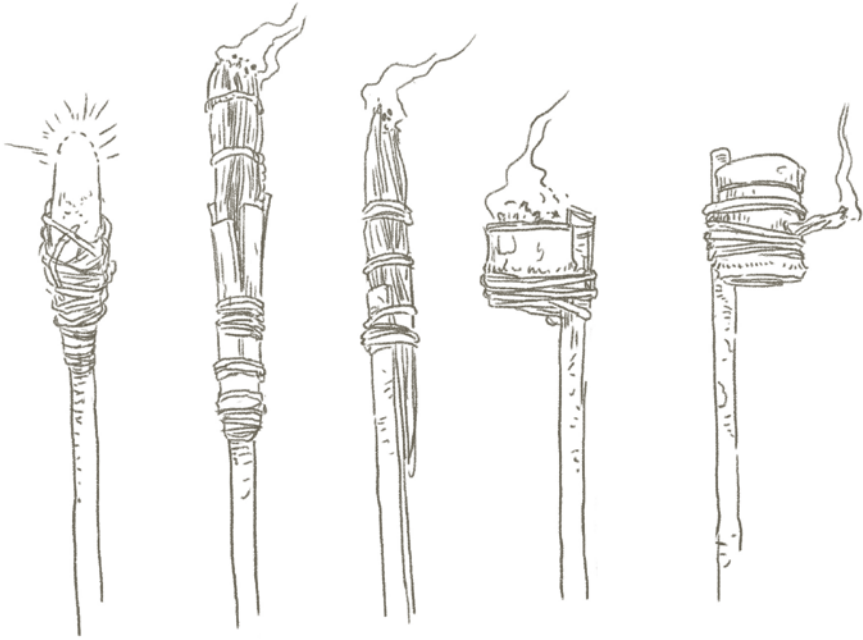


- ① More barracks. It is a HOSPITAL for MA MASALAQ'S<sup>(P236)</sup> throng. Any roach soldier may erupt into a flesh host; its final chamber is an ISOLATION PIT, where those so stricken are left.
- ② More nurseries. It is a PORT under PA IPPODO'S<sup>(P238)</sup> control. Many parts are filled with deep mud. Its final chamber is a LAKE full of giant catfish; CONNECTED TO THE RIVER with ribbon.
- ③ More stables. It is a FORT under MA KUNHEKAQ'S<sup>(P241)</sup> command. Its final chamber is a SPAWNING GROUND—a lobotomised CHASM CENTIPEDE<sup>(P242)</sup> is curled around a hundred young.
- ④ More workshops. It is a PRIORY of CHITIN WIZARDS<sup>(P232)</sup>. Predatory fungi fill passages, fed by sorcerous run-off. Its final chamber is an INCUBATOR, where a new roach monarch matures.
- ⑤ More temples. It is an EMBASSY in MA APAHU'S<sup>(P239)</sup> name. More orderly, less litter-filled—but every surface is coated in rust. Its final chamber is a SMELTER, abutting an active mine.
- ⑥ More larders, or an equal number of specialised halls. It is a GENERIC NEST, dedicated to no agenda except the accumulation of food and lucre. Its final chamber is another LARDER.



# TIME AND TRAVEL

The red light of A RESIN TORCH RELIABLY LASTS SIX HOURS.  
So the PALE-FOLK<sup>(P183)</sup> structure their lives around its length—  
and other peoples tend to follow suit.



What could the time of ONE TORCH mean?

- ① A boat journey along A STRETCH OF RIVER.
- ② A trek through TWO MEDIUM-SIZED CAVES.
- ③ A THIRD OF THE WAY across a deep region.
- ④ A satisfying MEAL AND GOOD, SOLID REST.
- ⑤ A breather, to DRY YOURSELF after a swim.







## NOTES

We're indebted to tabletop roleplaying's long history with caves and underground places: every dungeon ever, and also the Underdark—but particularly Patrick Stuart and Scrap Princess's awe-inspiring "Veins Of The Earth".

More than that we are indebted to the caves of Southeast Asia.

In East Kalimantan there are figurative cave paintings forty thousand years old. The Vieng Xai network kept Laotian freedom fighters safe from American bombardment during Operation Barrel Roll. According to Temiar tradition, Batu Caves was the ship of an unfilial son, cursed and turned to stone; now it is dedicated to Lord Murugan, and perhaps the most popular Hindu shrine outside India, drawing innumerable devotees annually.

As much as they are part of daily life, caves are still unknown spaces.

Central Vietnam's Son Doong Cave, the largest cavern passage in the world,

was only surveyed in 2009. The Mulu Caves Project began running exploratory expeditions of that limestone complex in 1977; it is still running expeditions today.

REACH OF THE ROACH GOD is inspired by such subterrestriality. Its images are reimaginings of the caves whose air we have breathed ourselves—the moist scent of a tunnel, leading to a secret lake; the light from holes in a distant roof; a stream, disappearing into darkness. The chirp of bats, the rustle of insects.

Life in the dark. Imagine: what would the peoples of such a world make of us?

Most of all we are indebted to the cockroach. Photos of it—and all its uncountable siblings—covering the walls of Gomantong Cave. Its musty smell, in the kitchen cabinet. The whirr of wings as it flies at your face. The brush of its leg on your earlobe, that you thought was your lover's touch.

## WHAT IS A THOUSAND THOUSAND ISLANDS?

A porous, patchwork reality—where rice grows in blood-red paddies, where princesses romance their spears, where it is a bad idea to mispronounce a crocodile's name.

A THOUSAND THOUSAND ISLANDS is a fantasy world designed for tabletop roleplaying games, inspired by the material cultures, lived realities, and mythologies of Southeast Asia.

Visit [athousandthousandislands.com](http://athousandthousandislands.com) for more.

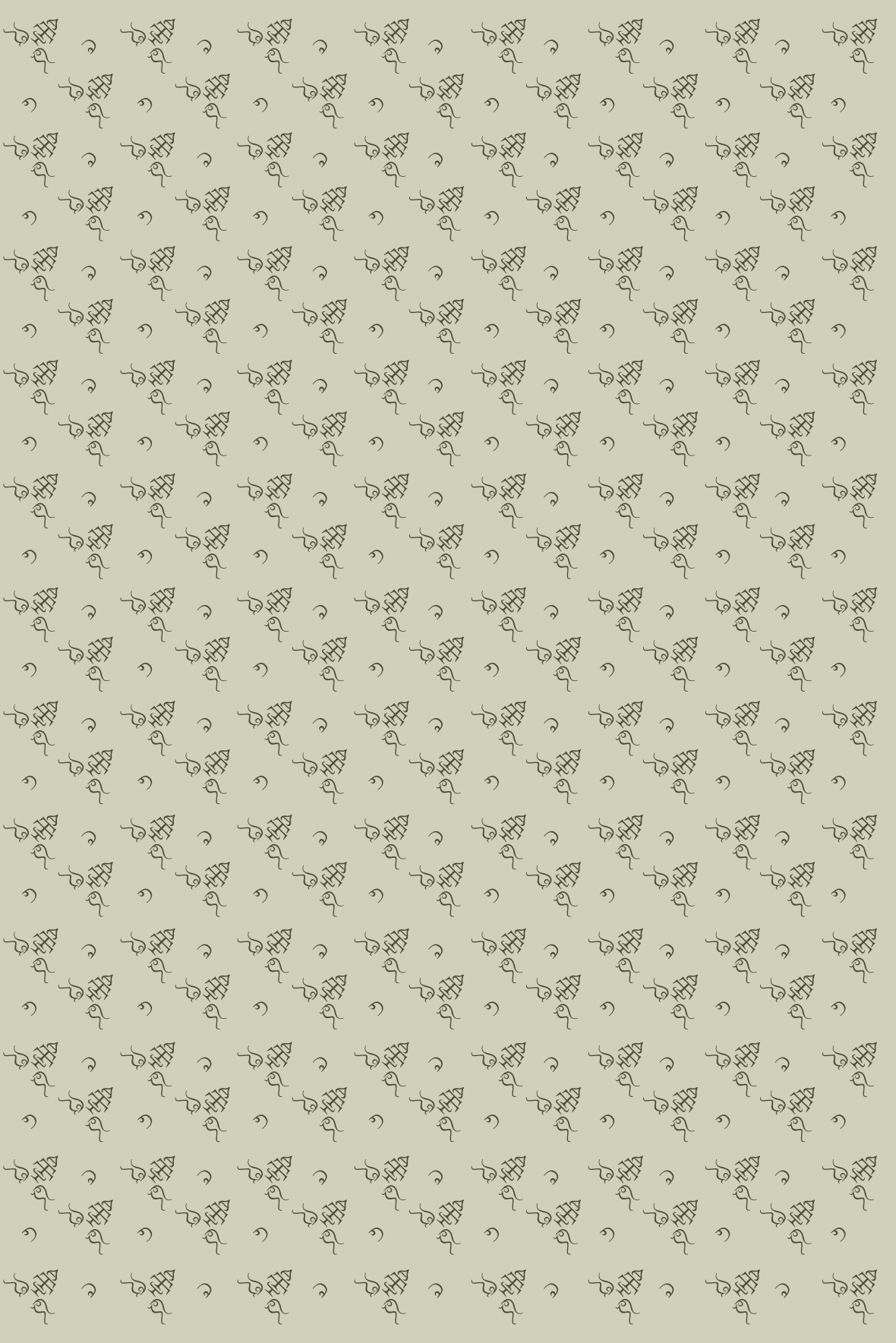












The cavern wall glitters,  
covered with gems: rich teardrop shapes.  
As uncounted as the sweat beading  
your skin. Rubies?

The thought makes you shiver.  
You step forward. Your lantern shakes.  
The rubies scatter.

They are roaches. They flee your light.  
All have disappeared all except one.

This one is paler.  
Prouder. Antennae twitching in rhythm,  
as if counting time to silent music.

Twitching in time with  
your heartbeat.



Reach Of The Roach God is tabletop roleplaying game (RPG) adventure setting, set in a world of caves. Players are drawn into its depths, meet new peoples, overcome strange dangers, and struggle against the roach god, Odoyoq.

Part of A Thousand Thousand Islands—a Southeast Asian-inspired fantasy world.